GUY MERVYN

BY BRANDON ROY.

From the Author

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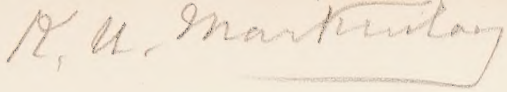
F. U. MacKinlay



GUY MERVYN

A Novel

BY

BRANDON ROY

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

LONDON

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GUY MERVYN.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"WELL," said Lady Elaine, with a long-drawn sigh, "for the most tiresome, foolish, aggravating, insane people in the world, give me a pair of lovers at cross purposes! Muriel, I hope you don't think I mean to be personal?"

Muriel bent low over her work, and made no answer.

"You can do nothing with them," went on Elaine, in a tone of mock indignation. "Consolation is useless; like the mourners

in Rama, they *will not* be comforted! Good advice is quite superfluous; reasoning with them makes them more unreasonable; in fact, they appear to feel with Jud Brownin, when he heard Rubinstein play, that 'it is happier to be miserable, than to be happy without being miserable.'"

"Don't, Elaine."

"Don't what?"

"Don't laugh at me. You can't understand these things."

A spasm of pain shot across Elaine's face, but she answered lightly:

"No, thank goodness! I was never in love. But I say nothing against real, honest love-making, except that it is an illusion, the joys of which are fleeting. What I object to is this absurd dilly-dallying—playing hide-and-seek with each other's affection, and making mutual martyrs of one another over a misunderstanding. *You* mope about with

pale cheeks, dark lines under your eyes, and a smile far more watery than tears, and piteous to behold. Cyril Branscome at a moment's notice leaves the Mervyns, who have been such friends to him, and starts off to seek his fortune in the world, simply because he has chanced to meet in the neighbourhood a young woman whom he is supposed to care nothing whatever about. This makes it perfectly plain, to all sane beholders, that you are both so deeply in love that you have reached the *idiotic* stage when lovers revel in making one another wretched; and, like Jud, had 'rather be miserable.' You want shaking—both of you!"

Muriel silently rose, laid down her embroidery, and, crossing over to the couch where Elaine was lying, sat down on a low foot-stool beside her, and hid her face.

"Ellie dear, don't talk to me like this.

It makes it so hard; and it is hard enough already. You have been laughing at, and running down, everything and everybody all day, so I suppose it is my turn; but I wish you would choose any other subject rather than this one."

"My dear child," Elaine said, in an altered tone, "I am so sorry; I am sure I did not mean to pain you. I suppose I am experiencing a little reaction to-day, after Sunday's extreme dissipation! But, seriously, dear, I do think you were foolish not to let me get some explanation out of Cyril Branscome through Guy; nothing could have been easier."

"No, no!" cried Muriel, shuddering. "He would have thought I was seeking to win him back. Ellie, my one comfort in all this is that I know I have never in any way deserved to forfeit his respect. Besides, the only explanation possible is that he ceased

to care for me when he found things did not all run smooth ; and certainly, the other day he took pains to make me feel that now he dislikes the very remembrance of our friendship in past years."

Elaine stroked the soft brown hair gently, as she said :

" If you are so sure that is so, dear, why not give him up and forget him ? He is not a worthy object for the one love of a woman's life. Why cannot you cease loving him ?"

Muriel raised her head, and in her brown eyes shone a sudden light, as she answered impetuously :

" Elaine, why cannot you cease breathing ? Because breath is life to you. Well, loving Cyril is life to me, and can only cease with life."

Then she hid her face again, and burst into tears.

" What a fool the man is," thought Elaine,

impatiently. "Come what will, at the next opportunity, I will speak to Guy."

"How selfish I am, Ellie!" said Muriel presently, looking up with a sad little smile, and very wet lashes; "I am always bothering you with my troubles; and to-day particularly, when you are not well, I should have cheered you up, instead of being so silly."

"Never mind, dear; it does me good to learn that there is such a thing in this heartless world as constancy in love. Muriel, do you think men ever love like this?"

Muriel had risen, and with her hands clasped above her head stood for some time looking out of the window; then answered slowly:

"I believe some do, Elaine; at least, they do in books."

"Yes, but you and I are not 'in books.' Do any of the men we know?"

"I cannot say," Muriel answered sadly: "I have seen one lately who I should think will love truly and faithfully, when he finds his sweetheart. But I also believed so of someone else. But are you thinking again of Montague?"

"I never think of Montague now," said Lady Elaine quietly.

"Oh, Ellie, I should be thankful if you never met him again! But what did you mean when you told me the other day that you knew at last what love meant?"

"Oh, nothing, Muriel. I was a little wild that night, and scarcely knew what I was saying. I certainly was not thinking of poor old Monty."

"I am so glad, Ellie."

Muriel bent over her, and kissed her forehead, and looked long and earnestly at the beautiful expressive face, the delicate sensitive mouth, the sweet loving eyes, marred

only by the half reckless look so often in them—the winning loveliness of the whole face and figure—and wondered again, as she had often done before, why some lives are spoilt and wasted, sacrificed to the sins and ambition of others.

"Where are you going, Muriel?"

"Upstairs for a little while, Ellie. I am anxious to finish looking over and destroying those old papers of papa's. Mother would be vexed if I brought any back again; and she made me promise to look over each one, in case anything of importance chanced to be amongst them. It seems rather unnecessary. They are chiefly old business letters of the driest possible kind; all most methodically tied up and labelled. I have about three bundles more to do, and the contents of an old desk."

"What cheerful work!" said Elaine. "Particularly calculated to raise your spirits

to-day. I am afraid I should throw them all into the wastepaper-basket as they are."

Muriel shook her head.

"A promise is a promise, Elaine; especially when made to one's mother."

"Well, *au revoir,* then, Muriel. I shall lie here and enjoy my roses, and muse on your dutifulness and virtue, and my own sins and shortcomings. But come down at five, for tea. Mrs. Joram is coming, and I cannot endure a *tête-à-tête* with her. She will discuss all kinds of subjects I do not wish to talk about."

When Muriel was gone, Elaine lay very still, with her eyes closed; and by-and-by a calm, quiet feeling stole over her. The humming of the bees amongst the flowers came softly in through the open window. No birds were singing; nothing but that low, soothing hum broke the perfect stillness of the summer afternoon. Presently a slight

breeze rustled amongst the trees, and gently flapped the blind to and fro, and stirred her hair like the breath of a little child, and laid spirit kisses on her brow and lips. Then her mind turned to that upon which she never dwelt, excepting in moments of rest and quiet such as these. She drew out the golden locket, and looked at the little curl.

"He would have been eight years old now, my baby! A merry little romping boy, with plenty of these brown curls for me to stroke and tumble, and kiss into order again. And he would have been all the world to me, and I should have been everything to him; and he would have called me *mother*. No one will ever call me mother now. And yet I *am* his mother, still. Perhaps he thinks of me so in heaven. Oh, my little one, my little one! Oh, for those little clinging hands to keep me right! Oh, for those baby eyes to shine out heaven's light to me! Surely no

woman can ever do wrong who has a tiny child to love her, and trust her, and call her *mother*."

And then she lay thinking over all the mistakes and disappointments and wrongs of her own life; of the time when she was young and innocent, and more sinned against than sinning; of the many bitter cups she had since had to drain to the very dregs; of the shame, the misery, the utter loss of faith in others—in all things; the loneliness of a loveless life; the despairing hopelessness, against which she could not strive; the reckless "what does it matter" which stifled and deadened all her higher aspirations after a better, truer life. All this, and much more, crowded in upon her brain, till she could bear to be alone no longer; and throwing down the crushed roses, all their fragrant beauty gone, she rose and went upstairs to Muriel's room.

Lady Elaine tapped at the door, but received no answer. She turned the handle, and opened it a few inches.

"Muriel dear, may I come in?"

Still perfect silence within. "She must have gone out," thought Elaine, and entered the room.

There, beside the writing-table where she had been sitting, Muriel lay stretched upon the floor in a dead faint. A heap of papers were on the table, and an open letter lay beside her, having evidently just fallen from her hand.

Elaine flew to the bell, and rang loudly for help; then, kneeling down, loosened her dress, and sprinkled her face with water. As she did so, her eye fell upon the open letter on the floor. It was in Muriel's own handwriting, and commenced: "*My dear, dear Cyril.*" Elaine turned quickly to the table, and there saw another letter, directed in

a bold, clear hand to "*Miss Muriel Bruce*," and a paper which had evidently enclosed them both, and on which was written in stiff, concise characters: "*Letters from C. B. to my daughter, and from my daughter to C. B., intercepted by me for her present and future welfare.*"

At one glance Lady Elaine saw and understood; understood how two young loving hearts had been sundered and broken; how two lives had been embittered for long weary months and years; how each had been forced to think the other false, and therein to suffer their keenest torment—and all this at the whim of a tyrannical, ambitious, worldly-minded old man.

"Poor little Muriel," she whispered, "my poor darling;" then bade them lift her carefully on to the sofa, and knelt beside her until the tinge of life crept back into her cheeks, and the dark lashes quivered and opened.

"What is it, Ellie?" she asked, with a dazed, wondering look.

"You have been ill, dear. Something upset you. I found you on the floor."

Then Muriel's eyes fell on the writing-table, and instantly memory returned to her.

"Oh, Elaine!" she cried. "Oh, Elaine, it was not his fault! He never got my letter!"

"I know, darling. Try and be calm. All will come right, now."

And she held her close, and thanked God that for Muriel the harm wrought by worldly ambition was not past repairing—not a whole life blighted past hope, like her own.

Oh fathers, with hard dry hearts, clear heads, and cool judgments; think what you have to answer for, when you let your own worldly-mindedness and mercenary ambition interpose between your daughters and those

to whom they have given the pure first love of their young hearts! Better were it for you that a millstone were hanged about your necks, and that you were drowned in the depth of the sea!

CHAPTER XXVII.

"I had hard work to bring him, Lady Elaine," Guy said, as they stood together in the drawing-room at The Towers. "Though I gave him your message, and added much persuasion of my own, for a long while he declared he could not and would not come here again; but at last the bait took. He could not resist the temptation of looking over those old books, and arranging them for you. If there is a thing Cyril enjoys, it is to be up to his eyes in ancient volumes, no matter how rotten and dusty. He spends hours in my uncle's library; whence he occasionally

emerges in a great state of excitement, and rushes upon me just as I am going fishing, to announce that he has found a 'gem,' a 'perfectly unique volume,' of which *I* am the fortunate possessor! He kicks over my bait-can in his hurry, and gets half-a-dozen flies hopelessly caught in his coat-tails. The 'gem' is a rusty old book, smelling like a churchyard. I say: 'My dear fellow, you may have it, and welcome, if you will just stand still while I unhook you, for you're spoiling my best orange dun.' He looks as indignant as if, instead of making him a present of the thing, I had said what I really felt: 'Botheration take it!'"

"You are a typical country squire, Guy," Lady Elaine said, smiling up at him. "While you can have your horses and dogs and fishing-rods, books are of no use to you. And so you think Mr. Branscome came here

for the sake of the library? That shows your man-like ignorance of the whole subject! He came here in the hope of seeing Muriel once again."

"But, Lady Elaine, that is the very thing he declares nothing shall induce him to do!"

"I dare say; but if ever you are in love, Guy, you will know what it is to be dying for a sight of somebody, and all the while persuading yourself and others that you have not the smallest wish ever to see that person again."

Why does the hot blood mount into his sunburnt cheeks as he stands before her? Why does an exquisite thrill of comfort glow in her heart as she sees it?

Guy has not forgotten!

"But sit down," she says lightly, after a few moments' silence; "sit down, and I will tell you the whole history of this modern

Romeo and Juliet—at all events, so far as it has at present gone. I suppose the last act is now about to be played. It is a most romantic story, and well worth hearing."

* * * * *

At a table in the library sits Cyril Branscome. A number of old volumes are before him, which he is mechanically looking through, and entering in a list; but the problem over which he is ruffling his hair and knitting his brows is not whether the valuable book he holds in his hand is an older edition than the one in the British Museum, nor whether the marginal notes are the author's own, or the work of another pen. It resolves itself into the simple question whether *she* is still here, or—gone.

So deeply is he wrapped in thought, that he does not hear the door gently open nor a light footstep crossing the floor.

"Cyril."

He starts violently at the sound of that low, sweet voice close beside him; then remains perfectly still, trying to decide whether he be dreaming or out of his senses; for he knows that a little hand is lying on his shoulder, and that Muriel is standing just behind, waiting for him to turn and answer her.

"Cyril," she says again—how the little hand on his shoulder is trembling!—"Cyril, I want to speak to you."

Why does she call him by his name, as though no broken promise, no long estranging years, lay between them?

Suddenly Cyril shakes off her hand, springs to his feet, and faces her. Their eyes meet, and his heart steels within him. He cannot mistake the love-light in her face. Pale she looks, and frightened enough, but resolved upon something; and in her eyes

shines out—love for him! Good heavens! Is this girl whom he loved — loved, ay, and honoured, until she gave him up for another—with all his soul—is she about to ask him to forgive her? Will she stoop so low as this? Not if he can help it!

"Cyril," she says, holding out her hand to him, "I am so glad you have come. I asked Elaine to send for you, because——"

"Miss Bruce," he breaks in sternly, leaning heavily on the table as he speaks, "this interview is not of my seeking, and for *you* to have sought it is scarcely consistent with what I remember of your nature. If I do not succeed in putting you altogether out of my mind, I would sooner be able to remember you—as you were."

A spasm of pain passes across her face, leaving it deadly white. For a moment she seems about to turn, and escape from

his presence. Then with an effort she faces him again, and says simply :

"You mistake me. I am only here to give you something which is yours by right, which I think you ought to have. I found this packet yesterday in an old desk of my father's. The enclosure in his writing will show you how it came there. Your letter to me"—here a little smile of happiness involuntarily plays on her quivering lips at the recollection of all that letter contains—"your letter to me, I keep; but mine to you I can but place in your own hands, where it should have been, and where I thought it was, when we met that evening in my father's study."

Her quiet womanly dignity, her sweet gentleness of reply to his scathing words, strike Cyril absolutely dumb. He takes the packet from her without a word; sees her cross the room and pass out, closing the

door behind her; and then, as in a dream, takes his place again at the table and examines its contents. How well he remembers that crabbed, stiff writing!—but he reads the words twice before they convey any meaning whatever to his mind. Then, as their sense suddenly flashes upon him, he turns quickly to the letter—Muriel's to him.

The room is very still as he opens it and reads. But he has not got half-way down the first page, when a wild cry bursts from him:

"Oh, Muriel! My love, my darling!"

* * * * *

Muriel lingered in the hall after leaving the library. The old clock solemnly ticked out the seconds, in monotonous duet with the loud beating of her own heart; otherwise all was so horribly quiet that she dared not move, lest he should hear, and know she

was still there. Those two or three minutes of silence seemed as many hours to Muriel. Then suddenly she heard that cry. It brought the colour to her cheeks, and gave her an unaccountable desire to run away and hide somewhere—anywhere—where he would not find her. The courage which had braved his hard words all fled before his love; and Muriel sped across the hall, through the drawing-room, and out at the French window, without pausing to look back or answer when Elaine called to her.

"Why, she is running away from him!" exclaimed Lady Elaine, laughing, and going to the window. "She has disappeared into the shrubbery already. I suppose we shall have Romeo after her, in full hue and cry, in another moment. Anyway, we will shut the window and give Muriel a start. I wonder," she went on, returning to her seat, "how she

ever screwed up her courage to go into the library and give him the letter. But she insisted on not trusting to the post, or any messenger again, though I offered to do it for her myself. I think it was very sweet and noble of her not to waver for a moment in her decision that he should have the letter at once, when one remembers how he behaved to her the other day."

"Very," said Guy, with deep feeling. "She is a splendid girl, and Cyril is a lucky fellow. But, believe me, Lady Elaine, he deserves her. He has loved her faithfully through it all, I know; and what could he think? By Jove, that old man has a lot to answer for!"

"Yes," she replied dreamily, playing with a lovely white rose as she spoke; "yes, a great deal, no doubt. But, Guy, to-day we see the harm he has done undone; we see good brought out of his evil; for these two will

love and trust each other now as they never could have done before. But some fathers, actuated by the same motives, have worked harm which can never, never be put right."

"In books," said Guy, "one reads of that sort of thing, but I never heard of it in real life."

Elaine was silent for some moments; then she said, hurriedly:

"Some time, Guy, if opportunity arises, I will tell you a sadder history than this one; sadder, because the misery wrought is hopelessly irremediable, and could no more be undone than you could put this rose together again." She pointed to the petals strewed in her lap. "A fitting emblem," she said, smiling bitterly, "of the life I am thinking of."

"Whose?" Guy asked, almost involuntarily.

"My own!" she said, and swept the frag-

ments of the flower off her lap on to the floor.

Guy knelt, and silently picked up the snow-white petals.

"Why do you do that?" she asked.

He paused, and looked up at her.

"Because I will not let anything which you have taken as an emblem of your life lie on the ground to be trampled on."

"Foolish boy!" she said, half playfully, half tenderly, leaning towards him as he knelt before her. "What difference can your doing so make to me? Facts are facts. It is a fact that my life is a spoiled one."

"Dear Lady Elaine," Guy said gently, "no life can be irrevocably spoiled while we have Jesus to take it in hand for us. The saddest life is full of grand possibilities, if only it be given to Him. I believe He brings some people to Himself through trouble and suffering who never would have

thought of Him if all had gone straight, and as they would have liked."

"Here endeth the first lesson!" said Elaine, laughing. "Go on. I am all attention."

Guy understood her by now, and knew how she often laughed only to hide deep feeling. So he answered, quietly:

"I am sure I don't want to preach, but I know for myself what the joy of being *His* means; and I do long for you to have the same happiness."

He looked at her gravely, earnestly; then said, with his own bright smile: "The idea of *me* preaching to *you*, Lady Elaine! For goodness' sake don't think I ever mean to do that when I talk out what is nearest my own heart. I always did that with you. Do you remember lecturing me for talking slang?"

"Yes; when you were a small boy!"

"Only about six feet in my stockings!"

"Was that all? Well, now that you have gathered up the fragments, what do you intend doing with them?"

"I do not know."

"Give them to me," she said; "I will decide." She held out both her hands, and he dropped the little heap of crushed rose-leaves into them.

She went over to her writing-table, and threw them into the wastepaper-basket.

"There, Guy," she said. "Spoilt to begin with, and finally—wasted."

"Is that your choice?" he asked gravely.

Before she could reply, the door opened, and Cyril hurried in.

"Where is Muriel?" he cried, and then, without waiting for an answer, made straight for the window through which she had passed. He fumbled at the lock, but could not open it. He seemed almost like one

walking in his sleep. Guy got up and opened it for him.

"God bless you, old fellow," he said, in a low tone; "I am so glad."

"Look at him!" cried Elaine. "There he goes, striding across the lawn in Muriel's very footsteps; and now he has entered the shrubbery exactly where she did. A curious instance of unconscious magnetic attraction. Well, I should like to see their meeting."

But that—no one saw.

* * * * *

"Do you quite forgive me, my darling?" Cyril said, for at least the twentieth time that afternoon.

Muriel sat on a low rustic seat in the shrubbery. He lay on the grass beside her.

"Hush, dear!" she whispered, bending over him, with a gentle smile of infinite tenderness. "Thank God, you and I have

nothing to forgive one another. But, dearest, in this first hour of our joy let us unite in forgiving—my poor father."

Cyril was silent for a few moments; then he put up his arm, and drew her head down to him.

"Yes, I forgive him, little one," he said; "for, after all, I have got you. But think, Muriel—think what might have been! Suppose he had burnt those letters?"

"No, don't think! We have nothing to do with might-have-beens, Cyril. All things work together for good to them that love Him."

"And, thank God, we both do that, darling. I believe the greatest happiness of all is to find that we are one *in Him*."

"And perhaps we should neither of us have been drawn to Him, if all had gone right three years ago."

"Perhaps not. I should never have

known Guy Mervyn. He was the means of leading me to Christ."

"And I sought Him in my trouble and loneliness, when I lost you."

"Why, we shall come, in time, to be thankful for that sad day!" Cyril said, smiling.

"I know I am thankful these long years are over," she whispered.

"Over for ever, my sweetheart," he said.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Mrs. Joram's little china drawing-room clock struck four, in its usual sharp, bustling way. The old clock in the hall, in its tall mahogany case, immediately did the same; but slowly and impressively, in deep reproving tones. Chimes commenced up somewhere on the landing; and a distant cuckoo uttered its note four times. Old Patterson, seated in the pantry, took out his large silver watch to make sure that its ancient hand pointed exactly to the hour of four; and finding that it did, rubbed it approvingly with his thumb; smiled, nodded, rubbed it again, and restored it to his waistcoat pocket. Patterson took a

special pride in his clocks, and experienced an hourly satisfaction in hearing them all strike exactly together. Indeed, Patterson took a pride in all his possessions. His pantry, his silver, his mistress—in fact, his whole establishment—were a source of pride and pompous pleasure to him, so long as they moved with dignity, lived with punctuality, and in every respect did him credit. When they failed in any way to act up to the high standard set for them, old Patterson would shake his head reprovingly, and after grumbling for awhile alone in his pantry, would go round the house and examine all his clocks, remarking sententiously :

"'Taint *your* fault, Peter Patterson. The only pity is, you haven't got the *winding* of the whole concern."

Mrs. Joram, seated in her drawing-room, looked up impatiently as the clock struck ; then sneezed violently, and indignantly

worried her nose with a lace pocket-handkerchief, as if chiding it for giving her so much unnecessary trouble.

"Of all unfortunate days to have developed such a cold!" she exclaimed, tapping her foot impatiently on the floor and giving her fat poodle a little angry poke with her toe. "I would have given anything to be there; and now it has all been over for hours, and I know absolutely nothing about it. Tiresome! Move away, you fat, lazy thing, and don't sit staring at me in that abject manner!"

Podge, the poodle, dragged his bulky body just out of reach of his mistress's black satin slipper, and settled down to meditate on the extreme variability of the feminine temper.

Mrs. Joram rang the bell.

"Now then, Patterson, how about this wedding? Is it over? Have the maids returned?"

Patterson produced his silver watch, with a quiet deliberation of manner meant to convey to his mistress that her state of mind was one of too great agitation.

"*I* know naught about this 'ere wedding, m'lady! except that folks said 'twas timed to take place at half-past eleven *a.m.*; and, if so be as they was punctual (which *ain't* likely), and arrived at the church *when* they was due (which ain't no ways probable), and allowing thirty minutes for the performing of the ceremony (which, to my thinking, is twenty-five too much), it ought to have been over four hours ago, exactly, seeing our house has just struck four p.m."

"I know, I know!" said Mrs. Joram testily. "But answer my question, will you! Have the maids come back?"

Patterson coughed, and replied more deliberately than ever:

"As for the maids, m'lady: when young

females is allowed to go a-gadding off to weddings at eleven o'clock of a morning you can't expect——"

"I will not have any more of your moralizing, Patterson!" burst in Mrs. Joram angrily. "*Yes* or *no*, have the maids come back?"

"—— to see anything more of 'em for the rest of that day," finished Patterson *sotto voce;* then aloud:

"No, ma'am, the maids have *not* come back."

"Tiresome things! Where have they gone?"

"Folks say there was to be a dinner at the Hall for anyone who liked to go."

"Oh, then they have gone, I suppose. Well, bring me my tea, Patterson; and let me know directly they come in."

"Very well, m'lady."

Patterson generally made a point of

addressing his mistress thus, although she had not the slightest claim to the title; because, as he used often to remark: "If Peter Patterson had had the winding-up of them powers that be, the late Mr. Joram would ha' been a knight-baronet three times over afore he died, for the punctuality of his habits and the pomposity of his appearance." Possibly little Mrs. Joram agreed with her old butler on this point; anyhow, his deferential "m'lady" was never forbidden.

Afternoon tea appears to possess an almost magical power of restoring calm to the female mind perturbed. Mrs. Joram had not finished her second cup before she began to sneeze less and smile more, and Podge was restored to favour, and called a "dear old fat beauty, then!" and given little flaky pieces of thin bread and butter, and the black silk work-bag was fished up from behind the sofa.

Presently light, fleet footsteps came flying up the gravel path ; a smiling face glanced in at the window, and the next moment Beryl Mervyn burst into the room, flushed with running, and resplendent in the unusual glories of bridal attire.

"Oh ! Mrs. Joram," she cried, giving her old friend a frantic hug, and treading on Podge in her haste ; "I have had such a race to get here, and such a business to escape from Gerty's tiresome 'supervision.' That is her last new word, you know. No, no, I shan't catch your cold, I am far too hot ! My dear Podge ! Don't make such a fuss. It can't hurt you to have your superfluous fat trodden upon occasionally. Now, dear Mrs. Joram, as you couldn't come to the wedding, I was determined the wedding should come to you ; or, at all events, part of it—and a very important part, for I was chief bridesmaid, and helped the bride to

take off her glove at the critical moment, and held it for her and her bouquet also, and had an extra handkerchief ready for her tears, in case she shed any, and required one—for hers was more ornamental than useful; and, in fact, attended to all the minor details of the whole performance; and said "*I do*," by mistake, about giving away the bride, because you know Guy was to do that, and I had coached him so much as to the exact tone and emphasis with which to say it, that when the time came, I forgot, and promptly said it myself. They chaffed me awfully about it afterwards. So now, take a good look at me; for just exactly like this—only not dusty or crumpled—I appeared at the wedding!"

Berry stepped back as she spoke, and stood before Mrs. Joram, such a vision of fresh English girlhood as was sweet to look upon. Those brilliant cheeks and dancing

eyes and tumbled curls made the study of the dress—although fresh from Worth's—a difficult task, even to Mrs. Joram. But the admiration on her face, and the satisfaction so clearly shown in her little energetic approving nods, quite contented Berry.

"It's pretty, isn't it? Even Gerty said I looked 'decent for once'; and Guy said I should feel like the old woman who bought a new cloak and bonnet, and went to church in them on Easter morning, and got there after the service had commenced; and as she walked up the aisle the choir was singing the Hallelujah Chorus, and she thought they all said: "Hardly-knew-ye, hardly-knew-ye!" and marched out again in high dudgeon. But Guy likes me in it awfully, and says I shall have a new one whenever I like, and he will pay the bills. But although it *is* a satisfaction to look so nice once in a way, I shouldn't like it often; because, you see, it's

such a trouble to put on, and oh! so tight when you are in it. I thought I should have died the first half-hour; and as for doing justice to the wedding breakfast, why, dear Mrs. Joram, it absolutely wouldn't have been safe! I had really nothing but a little bit of jelly and a sponge cake; though I longed for the cold chicken and lobster salad, and all the other good things. Gerty says—you know Gerty is always quoting French now—'Il faut souffrir pour être belle'; but I would far rather enjoy my lobster-salad, and be ugly! Wouldn't you?"

Mrs. Joram laughed.

"Quite right, my dear child. But now ring the bell, and we will have up some fresh tea, and you shall try and manage a cup, and then tell me all about it. What a darling, to remember her poor old friend! I thought I might see you some time to-day, if you got my note."

"Yes, I got it just as we were dressing. Oh! I wish you had been there. Dear Mrs. Joram, really you should not have stayed away for a cold."

"Yes, yes, my dear. No one should appear at a wedding with a bad influenza cold. To begin with, how can one look festive under such circumstances?—and then one would be positively certain to sneeze just in the impressive silence which follows the all important question to the couple; and think how painfully awkward that would be. Now sit down and have some tea."

"I really am ashamed to show my feet," said Berry, putting them up on a foot-stool, and contemplating them: a neat little white satin slipper on one; on the other, only a silk stocking: "but you ought to know all I have gone through for you. I ran all the way here with only one shoe on! Luckily the way through the wood is nearly all moss

and grass; but up the gravel path was martyrdom, and made me think of the poor pilgrims who used to walk to Rome with peas in their shoes; only Guy takes the point off that story by saying they *boiled* them first! My other shoe is on its way to Grayley now, behind the bridal pair. You see, they didn't want to be recognised there as starting on their honeymoon; and when the carriage came round to the door, while Muriel was saying good-bye, Cyril made the men take off their wedding favours. He tried to do it surreptitiously, but Guy heard him, and rushed in to me and said: 'Quick, Berry, an old white shoe!' I said: 'My dear boy, I don't deal in old white shoes! But here's one of my new ones, if that will do.' 'First rate!' Guy said. So I slipped it off, and when they were safely in, Guy tied it on to the back of the carriage, and they drove away in fine style, with my white satin

slipper swinging behind them. But didn't mother look shocked when I appeared back in the drawing-room with only one shoe on ; and didn't I catch it from Gerty after, and Guy not there to defend me either ; for we drove home almost directly after they left, and he stayed behind at The Towers talking to Lady Elaine."

"Ah, really! So, after all, the wedding breakfast took place at The Towers ?"

"Yes, it did. But we have a big feed going on at home, for the village people. Guy was determined to make it a high day for them, as Cyril is to be Vicar. Wasn't it lucky, old Mr. Drawler resigning just in the nick of time ? It will be lovely to have them at the Vicarage, so near us. What a contrast Muriel is to poor, sad little Mrs. Drawler! I know all the people will love her ; and she is so happy in it all. And, oh ! Mrs. Joram, she looked so lovely this morning, as

she came up the church on Guy's arm, dressed all in pure white, her sweet face so calm and trustful, and wonderfully happy. I almost wished for a moment that she was going to marry my Guy. I am not quite sure that Cyril is good enough for her. You see, he is shortsighted, and I really don't believe he saw the lovely look she gave him as she came up the chancel; and he is beginning to grow just a little bald on the top of his head. However, Muriel thinks him perfect, so I suppose it is all right; and I have hunted up all the advertisements of patent hair-restorers I could find for her—which Guy says was a 'work of supererogation,' whatever that may mean! I am thankful *now* that Guy was not the bridegroom, because by this time he would be miles away, wrapt up in somebody else, and quite forgetting that he ever had a little sister—which would be a real trial. Well, I must tell you how they

all behaved. Muriel was lovely; not in the least nervous. She answered rather low, but so clearly, everyone could hear; and as she said 'I will,' she looked up at Cyril, and something in her face made us all feel inclined to sniff. I had put her up to the dodge of saying—'love, honour and have my own way'; but she said 'obey,' quite decidedly, and I really believe she means to do it. Cyril was very nervous, I think. His voice shook once or twice, and I saw his hand tremble as he took hold of Muriel's. I know he was glad, poor old fellow, when it was all over, and he was safe away in the carriage with her. And, oh! Mrs. Joram, *my* dear boy looked splendid, and I was so proud of him. He wore a grey frock-coat, and lavender kid gloves, and a pink carnation in his button-hole—such a beauty, a double one. I chose it for him. He and Lady Elaine came down the church together. All

the bridesmaids had followed the couple, and we were standing in the porch waiting for our carriages as those two came down the aisle. Everyone looked after them, and I heard one old woman say: 'My! What a pair *they'd* ha' made!' I never before saw Lady Elaine look quite as she did just then. She had much more colour than usual, and her eyes were so bright; and as she stood by Guy in the porch, with her hand on his arm, she looked so young and happy. I think she is very glad to have got Muriel safely married and settled at last, after all her troubles."

"And who took the chief bridesmaid down the church?" asked Mrs. Joram, smiling.

Berry blushed crimson, and bent down to examine her little shoeless foot as she answered carelessly:

"Oh, Lord Montague Errol took me."

Mrs. Joram eyed her sharply, and gave a little disapproving shake of her head.

"Hum! And do you consider Lord Montague worth blushing about, my dear child?"

"I am not blushing, Mrs. Joram," began Berry, looking up; but then she caught sight of her scarlet face in the chiffonier glass opposite, and burst out laughing; and then, suddenly, tears would come and drop fast into her teacup; and the next moment she was sobbing, with her head hidden on Mrs. Joram's lap.

The old lady soothed her tenderly, for she had a motherly heart, and Berry had found her way into it; but while she comforted, she mentally exclaimed: "This will never do, never do, never do!"

"Oh! how can I be such an idiot!" sobbed poor little Berry, laughing hysterically and wiping her eyes, and then beginning to weep afresh. "Dear Mrs. Joram, what will you think? How can I be such an idiot!"

"Think, my darling? Why, that you are a little overstrained and tired with all the excitement of the day, and I have let you talk too long; that is all. No, don't get up. Stay quiet here a moment longer, and try my smelling-salts. You will soon feel better."

Berry gave a little sigh of relief, and pretended to sniff the salts vigorously. Then she dried her eyes, and looked up smiling.

"I never was so silly before, Mrs. Joram," she said impressively. "I do believe I have had what the maids call 'high-strikes.' Don't you think it is my tight dress? It has nothing whatever to do with Lord Montague."

"Oh no, nothing whatever," said Mrs. Joram dryly. "Who supposed it had?"

"And you won't tell mother?" asked Berry anxiously.

"My dear, I never tell mothers anything. If they have not eyes to see for themselves, it is very little good other people having eyes for them."

Berry sat quiet for a few moments, wringing out her wet pocket-handkerchief and spreading it on her knee to dry. Then she said earnestly:

"Do you know, I don't like him, Mrs. Joram."

"If 'him' means Lord Montague, neither do I, my dear Beryl."

Silence for a minute or two. Mrs. Joram took up some knitting; Berry screwed and unscrewed the bottle of salts, and surreptitiously applied it to Podge's nose. Then she said, slowly and thoughtfully:

"But, dear Mrs. Joram, there is something so strange about him. It gives me a queer feeling all over when he looks at me with his flashing black eyes; and when he put me

into the carriage he touched my hand for an instant, and do you know it felt different to the other for hours after."

Berry spread out her little brown hand and looked at it anxiously. Mrs. Joram looked at it too, and smiled grimly.

"How old are you, little Berry?" she said presently.

"Nearly fifteen," Berry answered, looking up inquiringly.

"Ah! nearly fifteen? Well, I think you are old enough to understand what I am going to tell you. Do you know what brings Lord Montague so often to The Towers?"

"No," said Berry, surprised; "unless it is the tennis, and the shooting, and the fishing."

"Well, listen, and I will tell you," said Mrs. Joram gravely. "Lord Montague comes so often to The Towers because he is in love with Lady Elaine."

Berry started up, flushing crimson.

"But, Mrs. Joram," she began indignantly, "Lady Elaine is——" her voice died away, and she stood startled and trembling before her old friend.

"I know, dear," Mrs. Joram said quietly; "Lady Elaine is a married woman. But men like Lord Montague respect no laws, either human or divine."

She watched the flush die out of the young face, and saw the shudder as Beryl involuntarily wiped her right hand with her pocket-handkerchief. It was a sharp lesson, but it did its work.

"I think I must go home now, Mrs. Joram."

"Good-bye, darling. Go and find your dear Guy, and tell him I send him my love, and my congratulations on his little Berry's appearance."

Mrs. Joram watched her walk slowly down

the path, pass through the little iron gate, and disappear into the wood. Then she got up, and rang the bell, remarking complacently: "Hum! A stitch in time saves nine."

CHAPTER XXIX.

Guy stood beneath the great cedar at The Towers, talking to Muriel's mother. He had brought her there, soon after the departure of the bridal pair, having noticed how nervous and alone she looked amidst the gay assemblage, now Muriel was gone; and how, though overstrained and tired, she hardly liked to go to her own room and rest. So he drew her away, and installed her in a comfortable garden-chair, and leaned his back against the old tree, and held forth on Cyril's virtues, all their bright plans for the future, and the changes they must make at the Vicarage before Muriel's return—pre-

tending not to notice the silent tears which the poor little mother could not keep from shedding.

Mrs. Bruce was one of those meek, sensitive people, possessing no strength of mind or individuality of their own, who develop wonderfully if their lines happen to fall in pleasant places, but are quenched and subdued with astonishing facility if the reverse should chance to be the case. Her husband's morose nature and harsh dogmatic manner would have utterly extinguished her, had it not been for Muriel's loving devotion and thoughtful tenderness; and though three happy years of peaceful widowhood had done much for poor Mrs. Bruce, she still bore traces of a long course of that painful discipline commonly known as being "sat upon." All her ideas were of a negative, rather than a positive nature; and if she ever expressed a decided opinion, she never failed

to preface it with a "Don't you think," and carefully to end by assuring you that of course she was well aware that she knew nothing at all about the subject. She had been sweetly unselfish all her life; partly because her natural disposition tended that way, and partly because she had never had strength of mind to dream of being anything else. Her widow's cap became her wonderfully well, and set off the soft grey hair and patient eyes; and now that she lived in an atmosphere of loving appreciation, the lines of anxious care and perpetual distress were smoothing off her brow, and Mrs. Bruce was emphatically what people call "a sweet woman." She liked Guy vastly; partly because Muriel did, partly because he never asked her point-blank questions, or handed her the bread and butter until she had succeeded in finding a little corner of the table on which to place her cup of tea in safety—

and chiefly because he was so young, and strong, and handsome, and yet had come a whole mile out of his way the other day to take her through the field where a most dangerous bull had been turned out for a few hours a week before; and had never let out afterwards how she screamed and clung to him when she mistook an elderly cow, looking over the hedge, for the terrible animal in question. So she gladly followed him to the cedar, and let him comfort and amuse her, and talk to her of Muriel, and of happy days to come.

The last of the wedding guests had gone. Lady Elaine sighed wearily as she returned to the drawing-room. "Thank goodness, people don't get married every day, Monty," she remarked to her cousin, who lounged on a seat outside the window, smoking a cigarette. Then she stepped on to the terrace, and glanced quickly around.

"Now, Monty, don't be lazy! You have had an easy enough time of it to-day; and, by the way, I saw you flirting shamefully with little Beryl Mervyn. So absurd of you! Why, excepting on grand occasions like this, she is only a little schoolroom girl in short frocks. You have no business to try and turn her poor little head with your nonsense. Now, if you must smoke those nasty cigarettes, do make yourself useful, and go and smoke them in Mr. Monk's company; for he has just come home, a day sooner than we expected, and his remarks about our little entertainment here were neither amiable nor parliamentary. Go and talk him over, there's a good boy. He is in the billiard-room. Do your best, and save me a bad time later on."

Montague got up, and laughed a short, hard laugh.

"Confound the brute!" he said. "I thought

I should have you to myself for the rest of the day, Ellie, with only the old lady about, to make it all proper; and we could easily have persuaded her to dine upstairs, after her unusual exertions, mental and physical, etc. But can't you spare half-an-hour for me now, dear?"

"Impossible, Monty. I must go and do the civil to the old lady, as you please to call her, whom I see seated under the cedar, no doubt bewailing Muriel's departure. I can't leave her alone. Do go along."

"Well, I'll come too, and make it lively for you both. You know, comforting forlorn old mammas isn't in your line, sweet coz."

"Now, why on earth can't you do as I ask you, Montague?" Elaine said impatiently. "I had rather be alone with Mrs. Bruce, and I particularly want you to go and amuse Mr. Monk. Why can't you be obliging for once?"

"All right, all right! No need to snap a fellow's head off! You know I am always at your beck and call, Ellie. I'll beard the lion — bear, rather — in his den. Good-bye."

"Good-bye. Now *do* go along, Monty, and don't stand there gazing at me. *I* am not little Beryl Mervyn or anything half so fresh and pretty."

He came close up to her and said something in low, tender tones; then took one of the yellow roses out of her girdle, without any 'with-your-leave,' or 'by-your-leave,' and placed it in his own button-hole. "A small reward for such self-sacrifice," he said, and strolled off to the billiard-room.

Elaine watched him out of sight, then turned, and walked quickly across the smooth, sunlit lawn.

"Have I kept you waiting, Guy?" she said, as she bent her fair head, and came

under the shadow of the great dark branches.

"No, no, Lady Elaine," Guy answered, smiling. "Mrs. Bruce and I have been so busy discussing future plans, we only just noticed that all your other guests were gone."

"I am afraid I have been detaining Sir Guy," began Mrs. Bruce apologetically.

"No, I don't think so," said Lady Elaine. "I made him promise to wait behind, this afternoon, and go for a walk with me. Sir Guy's conversation has a most calming effect on one's nerves, as perhaps you have found; and I was not sure what condition mine might not be in, after this great event."

She looked archly at him from under her large hat, and beckoned him to come to her.

Is not this playing with fire, Guy? What

are you made of, to stand calmly there with folded arms, your back against the old tree, looking steadily at her? Can you look at such loveliness in woman without your heart beating and your blood dancing? And why is she so lovely? Why is her white cheek glowing just now, why are her dreamy eyes sparkling? Can you not see the love-light shining in them? Why is she swaying her tall lithe figure to and fro, and tapping her foot on the ground impatiently? Who is she waiting for? Is your will iron, Guy? Is your strength superhuman, that you dare thus play with fire? Or are you at this moment leaning upon a strength that is Divine?

"And how about Mrs. Bruce?" Guy said.

"Oh, *pray* don't trouble about me," began Mrs. Bruce anxiously.

"I know Mrs. Bruce would rather be

quietly alone for a little while; wouldn't you?" Elaine said, in her most winning way, coming a little nearer, and bending over the garden-chair. "I have ordered them to bring you tea out here at five. It is after four now, so don't wait for me; and have it taken up to your room, if you like it better. Muriel's mother must make herself quite at home here, although Muriel is away."

And then, knowing Guy's eyes to be upon her, with a sudden impulse she stooped and kissed Mrs. Bruce.

"And now Guy, come."

"I am coming," he said, and followed her over the lawn.

* * * * *

"I am never sure which I like best, spring or autumn." Elaine remarked, turning to look back over the cornfield through which they had just passed. "Spring is fresh,

and young, and bright, with songs of birds, and budding green; and makes one think of one's young life, when all was gay and hopeful. But autumn is so rich, and still, and full of wonderful depths of colour; and seems to me to represent a life that is filled and satisfied--rich with a wealth of love, and mellowed with earnest joys; a life such as I may dream of, but can never know."

She leaned against the stile, and softly fanned herself with her large hat. Guy looked at her in silence, wondering at her sudden change of mood.

The golden sheaves stood all around them, and in the distance the reapers were singing at their work.

"Oh! it is lovely, it is lovely!" she said softly, more to herself than to him; "an idyl in crimson and gold. I wish I was a reaper in the harvest fields. I should like to be that girl over there, in the blue cotton gown,

with the red handkerchief tied over her head, and a little laughing baby boy on her back. I wonder what she is carrying so carefully across the field in that brown jug; tea, no doubt. Ah! we might have guessed it was for that handsome young reaper, with the strong, bare arms and sunburnt face. How good it will taste out of that little old brown jug!—even though it may be weak, and did only cost one and twopence a pound. Look at him kissing the baby and tossing it in the air; and now I do believe he has kissed her, too. No wonder she wears such a smiling, happy face, as she goes gaily singing home."

She sighed, and they stood in silence again, and watched the young husband drink his tea, which he did with evident relish, and went whistling back to his work.

"Now we will go up into the woods," said Elaine.

"Mind how you get over the stile," Guy said; "for that rotten old step at the bottom has given way at last. Farmer Hurst does not keep his gates and stiles in very good repair."

"They are much more picturesque like this," said Elaine, taking his proffered hand. "Now, shall we sit under our old beech-tree, or go further on into the wood?"

"Whichever you like, Lady Elaine," Guy answered quietly.

"Well, let us go on a little way, and get off the path, where we shall not be interrupted."

They walked on in silence. Guy was ill at ease. She had said "*our* old beech-tree," looking at him with a half smile, and laying a slight stress on the pronoun; and this was not the first time she had made allusions lately to a past which he had begged her to forgive and forget. He dropped a little

behind, and followed slowly as she led the way, over the soft brown moss and golden leaves, to where the trunk of a fallen tree made a good seat. Here she sat down, and smilingly signed to him to do the same. But Guy stood before her, irresolute.

"I almost think, Lady Elaine, I should be going back to the Hall. We have a good deal doing there, and I may be wanted."

"Oh, nonsense! No false excuses!" she said, flushing suddenly and forcing a laugh. "You know you told me your steward would manage all the doings at the Hall, so as to leave you free for our festivities. If you are tired of my company, say so—and go; but don't make polite excuses to *me*."

She spoke so petulantly, that poor Guy looked at her in mute astonishment, and answered never a word.

The next moment her mood changed.

"Guy," she said, with a pathetic little

quiver in her voice, "are you tired of trying to convert me? Do you think that the more you preach the worse I grow? Are you going to give me up as a hopeless case, and turn your attention to more hopeful subjects?"

She clasped her hands round her knees and looked up at him with great wistful eyes. The slanting rays of the autumn sun shone on her soft golden hair, and Guy's thoughts went back to the day when, to his boyish eyes, it seemed a golden halo, and she a fair Madonna. Was it so long ago —so very long ago?

"Dear Lady Elaine," he said gently, "don't speak so. You know there is nothing on earth I would not do to be any help or comfort to you if I could. And it is rather hard on a fellow to talk about 'preaching' and 'converting,' when you know I only talked it all out with you because my thoughts were full

of it; just as in the old times I used to tell you all about my fiddles, and dogs, and horses, and such-like things, which I am afraid can't have interested you much."

He threw himself down on the dry brown moss as he spoke, and leaning on his elbow, met her wistful gaze with open earnest eyes.

She did not answer, but her lips quivered with some suppressed emotion, and the blue veins stood out on her clasped hands.

"You see," Guy went on slowly, turning his head and looking far away through the shadowy vista of tree-stems, "when all this wonderful new joy came into my life: when I really found out all that Christ the Lord could be to a fellow—all He could do for one—my first thought, my first wish was to tell it all to you. I should have written to you at once, if I had dared; and all those months I was in a tremendous hurry to be back so that

you might know what He had done for me. None knew so well as you what a good-for-nothing fellow I was when I went away; and I wanted you to see how His grace had pulled me through what I thought I never should get over; and how He can make all things new when He takes one in hand."

Guy paused for a moment, but did not look round, or he would have been startled at the dumb anguish in the eyes fixed upon him. She spoke no word, made no sound; and after waiting a little, he went on, half hesitatingly, in low earnest tones:

"I hoped that the Lord, who had done so much for me, would become a Comforter to you in all your troubles. I hoped He would be to you all and more than He is to me. But we have talked so often now, and I suppose I don't put it clearly, or express well what I mean; for each time it seems to me we get further from the point,

and I am less and less able to make you understand how real and how true it all is."

"It is not your fault," she said gently. "It is nothing in *you*, Guy."

"What is it, then?" he asked, very low, still looking away from her.

"Don't you remember the spoilt rose, and how I told you then, two months ago, that my life was a ruined and wasted one? You wouldn't believe it then. Now you begin to see that it is true. Even *your* Christ can do nothing for me. I am past hope, past help. Listen! The time has come for me to tell you how I came to be as I am, and what I am. I will tell it you as shortly and simply as I can—only the bare, plain facts; and when you know all, you can bid me good-bye—good-bye for ever—and go; and I will try not to call you back, though your simple faith and your trust in God are the only stars of hope that shine

on my dark life, the only beacons to light me on to better things."

Guy shaded his face with his hand, and she saw him square his broad shoulders in the way she remembered so well of old, whenever there was conflict in his mind.

She went on speaking, in low, hurried tones :

"I think you know that I was the only daughter of the Earl of Harless. I have two brothers : one is in India with his regiment, the other is the present Earl. I had a happy childhood, spent in my father's parks and forests, wandering about amongst the herds of gentle deer, or riding my pony for miles and miles over lovely country, which all belonged, as I was often told, to the Earl —my father. Being the only girl, and both my brothers older than myself, I was made much of by everyone, and grew up without a sorrow, till my sweet mother died, when I

was about eleven years old. After that, for five or six years, I lived a lonely life, being left entirely to servants and governesses, having all I wanted, but rarely seeing either my father or brothers. Whenever I did see my father, he seemed to me each time older, sterner, and more careworn than before; but I never guessed the cause, or knew that the beautiful parks and forests, which had been ours for centuries, were one by one slipping away from us. I never really knew how it all came about, but I believe for a long while the Earls of Harless had had more lands than money; and my father lost heavily for years on the racecourse, and then suddenly found that his sons had followed in his footsteps, and done the same, and ruin hung over our old house. When I was sixteen I was allowed to spend some months with a sister of my father's. There I found myself surrounded by cousins of my own age and older; the

world, with all its charms and delights, burst upon me, and I passed from childhood into girlhood. I had plenty of admirers amongst my cousins and their college friends, and one —one of them became my lover. When I was summoned home again he followed me. His own home was only a few miles away; nothing was thought of his constantly riding over, and we spent many happy weeks and months together. He was tall, handsome, and clever, about six years older than I, passionately in love with me; and I thought I loved him in the same way."

Lady Elaine paused for a moment, then added very low, as if half to herself: "But I know now that my love for him was of a very girlish kind, such as a first lover can easily win from a child of sixteen. I did not know then, as I do now, what real *love* means."

Guy had raised his head; and at these

half-uttered words, a dark look passed over his face. He knew well *who* was trying hard to awaken love in the heart of this unloved wife. Had she then learned the shameful lesson so well?

"We were secretly engaged," went on Elaine; "but though we said nothing to my father, he knew quite well what was going on; he constantly saw us together, and made no objection. In fact, when the Earl was at home, my lover often stayed in the house, and went in and out like one of my own brothers.

"One day I was told that a friend of my father's was coming to stay with us, to whom special attention was to be shown. Anxious to please the Earl, who grew each day more gloomy and morose, I dressed in my best, decked the rooms with flowers, and that evening saw Mr. Monk for the first time. As you may

suppose, I was not prepossessed by his appearance. My lover was dining with us that night. In the course of the evening he drew me out on to the terrace, and said: 'Ellie, what a horrid-looking old beast your father has picked up; and he hardly took his eyes off you during dinner. I don't like you to be in the same house with him. Do keep out of his way, my darling.' I readily promised, but did not find keeping out of his way an easy matter. He forced his objectionable company perpetually upon me, and my father was furious if I repulsed him. My lover came over as often as possible, and after awhile told me he had found out that my father was involved in terrible money difficulties, and this Mr. Monk held the mortgage of nearly all our estates, and had lent my father immense sums beside. I could not understand why my

lover was so troubled over this news, or why he kept saying: 'Oh Ellie, if I were but rich enough to marry you at once! For God's sake, darling, keep out of that old brute's way!' I laughed and said: 'But, dear, he can't hurt me. *I'm* not mortgaged to him.' But my lover only swore deeper oaths, and strode up and down the room; and then snatched me in his arms, and made me promise to marry no one else, whatever happened. To cut a long story short, my poor lover's presentiments were right. Mr. Monk conceived a fiendish passion for me — child though I was, and he old enough to be my father— and to gratify this whim he was willing to concede the enormous sum my father owed him on loans and mortgages. The old Earl was selfish and heartless; his daughter's happiness and innocence weighed nothing in the balance against his broad

lands and estates, and the honour of his ancient name. So they settled it between them, and I was *sold.* Mr. Monk had the grace to attempt a little courting; but finding himself repulsed with horror, he showed his white teeth, and smilingly told me I should know better by-and-by. My poor young lover fought bravely to save me. He saw my father; implored, stormed, threatened, but to no avail. Then he arranged an elopement, which unfortunately was discovered and prevented. On the very eve of my wedding he wrote imploring me to refuse before the altar to marry 'that damned fiend,' and he would be there to uphold me. He was there, poor boy, and his white face haunted me for months after. But I had not the courage to make a public scene; they found me a meek victim, when the moment came; and they married me to Mr. Monk on my seventeenth birthday. Perhaps

I might have resisted more, Guy ; but I was so young, so helpless, so alone. I knelt at my father's feet, and implored him to let me off; but more than that I dared not do, his fury was so terrible. And foolish friends persuaded me that as this millionaire's wife I should be rich, courted, and admired, and have all I wanted. I did not know all that marriage meant; and though I disliked him, and was terrified at the idea of going away with him, and never seeing my own lover again, still, to a child of seventeen, life cannot look all dark. Even on my wedding morning I had *some* hopeful dreams—oh God, the waking! Guy, I awoke—in hell!"

Guy sprang to his feet. Her face was deadly pale. Her voice, though almost a whisper, was so fearful in its tone of suppressed horror. She looked wildly round, as if to find a way of escape from an unseen danger, and flung up her arms above her

head. In a moment Guy's strong right arm was round her, or she would have fallen forward at his feet. Her beautiful head sank back against his shoulder, and her quivering eyelids closed.

"My God! what shall I do?" exclaimed poor Guy. "Lady Elaine!"

At sound of his voice she opened her eyes, and seeing the trouble and dismay in his face, made a strong effort to recover herself.

"Never mind, Guy," she whispered, sitting up; "it is over now. I shall soon be better. I was passing through terrors such as you can never understand; I was seeing horrors such as you can never picture. God forbid you should. It is foolish of me. I thought I could tell it calmly. Don't look so horrified, my dear boy. Take that hollow bit of bark, and fetch me up a little water from the brook."

She smiled feebly, as he hesitated to leave her, and again bid him go. When he came back, she appeared quite herself again.

"You know, I sometimes get these attacks of faintness now, Guy," she explained, as she dipped her handkerchief in the water, and wiped her lips and brow. "I don't think I am very strong, and what with the wedding, and one thing and another, it has been rather too much of a day. Weddings always sadden me, too; especially happy ones. A selfish, dog-in-the-manger sort of feeling, I suppose. No, please don't speak about my story. I couldn't bear a sympathetic word just now. I should have a desperate fit of crying, and you men hate tears. I know you are sorry for me; but 'what can't be cured must be endured,' to quote an aggravating old proverb."

She was quite herself once more. That scene of anguish had faded like a dream.

She would not let him speak again of serious things. But Guy's young heart was wrung for her, and the old tenderness *would* creep into his voice as they talked of Muriel and the wedding, and the changes the new Vicar hoped to bring about in the church; and she grew brighter and more gay each minute, and laughed hysterically over the episode of Berry's white shoe. And when she rose, and they turned homeward, some strange excitement had brought colour to her cheeks; and Guy marvelled in his heart at her wondrous beauty, as she lingered for a moment under the old beech-tree, and stood with her hands clasped above her head, looking out over the cornfields, the rays of the setting sun shining in her eyes. She looked ten years younger than he had ever seen her look before. A half smile played about her lips, dimpling the corners of her lovely mouth. Guy thought she had forgotten his presence,

and for a moment he lost himself, and stood there, drinking in her exquisite loveliness. Suddenly she turned, and caught the look in his eyes.

"Guy!" she cried, "Guy! Here—in this very spot—you kissed me. Do you remember?"

He started in intense surprise, and stood before her, dumb.

She came a step nearer, and smiled up at him.

"You were very much in love, that afternoon, naughty boy!" she said half playfully, half seriously, "and I sometimes wonder—Guy, do you love me still?"

A deep, unbroken silence in the wood.

Away across the fields the reapers are still singing as they gather in the sheaves.

The village clock strikes six.

As the last stroke dies away, Guy speaks; but his voice seems to him to come from a

long way off, and sounds so hard and cold, he hardly knows it for his own.

"Lady Elaine, I think you forget yourself," is all he says.

"How horrid you are," she cries passionately, "and how idiotic! I was only in play. What do you mean by answering me seriously? Oh! I hate religion; and I wish to goodness you had come back as you went away, and not full of all these canting ideas!"

Then she burst into a passion of tears, turned from him, and hurried down the little path to the fields.

Guy saw her, blinded by her tears, mount the stile. He sprang forward, crying out: "Remember the broken step!" But it was too late. Her foot slipped, and she fell, striking her head violently, and with her ankle twisted beneath her.

With a wild cry, Guy sprang down the bank and vaulted over the stile.

She lay quite still, her eyes closed, her colourless face upturned, her fair hair tinged with blood. Guy thought the blow had struck her senseless. He threw himself on his knees beside her, and half raised her in his arms; and a cry burst from him, full of tender yearning anguish:

"Oh, my darling, my darling!"

And so Lady Elaine got her answer.

It brought the tint of life back to her cheeks, and she slowly opened her eyes.

"I am not killed, Guy," she said, trying to smile at him; "but I have hurt my foot terribly; broken it, I think. How shall I get home?"

"I can carry you," he said, and raised her tenderly, and started off across the field.

She expostulated feebly.

"You will hurt yourself, Guy; I am too heavy."

"Not a bit," he answered. "I have often

carried much heavier weights. Besides, you are lighter than I should have thought—very light for your height, Lady Elaine."

"But you surely cannot get over the stile with me?"

"Then I will go round by the gate."

She said no more; but lay back in his strong young arms, closing her eyes like a tired child. Just as they reached the road, they heard the sound of fast approaching wheels.

"Why, it is the carriage back from Grayley!" cried Guy, as Elaine's own favourite greys swept round the corner. "How lucky!"

With the help of the men, he got her safely in, propping the injured foot upon the cushions; the footman tore off to the stables to saddle a horse and ride for the doctor; and Guy got in opposite her, and gently insisted on taking her boot off at once, before the swelling of her ankle increased. She

smiled to see his big strong fingers go so gently to work, and when he produced pocket scissors and snipped off all the buttons she laughed outright, notwithstanding the pain.

"You would make a good doctor, Guy."

"I should love the work!" he answered brightly.

She was soon safely ensconced on the drawing-room sofa, awaiting the doctor's arrival.

Mrs. Bruce went into a state of great agitation over the accident, and was most anxious to be of use; though assuring them over and over that she was perfectly aware she knew nothing whatever about sprains or broken bones, and was apt to be sadly in the way on these occasions. Guy saw she worried Elaine, so he asked leave to wait and hear the doctor's opinion, and meanwhile took Mrs. Bruce into the garden.

The doctor arrived post-haste. Half an hour passed. It seemed hours to Guy since a maid had pulled down those drawing-room blinds. Then they heard the doctor go, and the maid appeared, saying:

"Her ladyship would like to speak to Sir Guy Mervyn."

Guy found her upon the sofa, white with pain; but she received him with a smile.

"'Only a bad sprain,' he says; but, oh! he has mauled me about so horribly, to make sure no bones were broken. And now it is bandaged and arranged; but it may be weeks before I can get about much. I am to be carried upstairs presently. Good-bye, Guy. Will you come and see me sometimes in my forced imprisonment? Thank you for all you have done." She put her hand into his; then added low and wistfully: "Am I forgiven, Guy?"

"It is you who must forgive me," he said

gently. "It was my fault. I took in earnest what you meant in play; only, you see, I hardly thought you would have chaffed me on that subject."

She smiled farewell. But when he was gone, she broke into bitter weeping, moaning to herself: "Oh, my boy-lover, my boy-lover!—lost to me for ever—for ever!"

Alas! poor lonely heart.

CHAPTER XXX.

"Sugar, Guy?"

Mrs. Cyril Branscome stood by a little tea-table in the pretty Vicarage drawing-room, with a cup of tea in one hand and a dainty pair of sugar-tongs in the other. She poised them inquiringly in mid-air, as she put the important question.

"Sugar, Guy?"

"Plenty, please," Guy answered, coming round to fetch his cup. "I've a whacking big sweet-tooth, and rarely get enough really to suit me, except when Berry presides over the teapot. Gerty gives me short allowance on principle; don't you, Gerty? And mother is

not over generous; only I can work her, by silently passing my cup back in the midst of an interesting conversation, when she absently pops in two more lumps, without knowing it."

"It is very unfashionable to take sugar at all, now," remarked Gertrude, who rather plumed herself on knowing just 'the thing' to say and do in society.

"That is crushing for Guy," laughed Cyril, from his seat on the music-stool. "Can you survive being unfashionable, and enjoy your sugar notwithstanding, eh, old fellow?"

"Well, I'm not much of a masher," said Guy, looking about among the large variety of pretty little chairs for one strong enough to bear him in safety.

"Of course *I* don't know very much about it," put in Mrs. Bruce, in a gentle, timid voice; "but they *do* say *much* sugar causes acidity."

She looked anxiously round for someone

to confirm this opinion; but Berry, at that moment, choked violently in her cup, and had to be patted on the back by Guy; and in the commotion thus caused, the subject dropped.

This was Muriel's first afternoon-tea party, and quite an event to both households. They had returned, a fortnight before, from their short honeymoon; and wonderful changes—transmogrifications, Guy called them—had been going on at the Vicarage; and great was the excitement caused in the village by the arrival of Maple's huge furniture-vans.

To-day Mrs. Mervyn and Gertrude saw for the first time the result of all the thought and labour of the last ten days. Guy and Beryl had been in all the secrets, and had gone in and out, helping, hammering, carrying, admiring, giving sage opinions as to where each article of furniture should stand,

and keeping up a perpetual stream of happy fun and chaff with Cyril and his sweet young wife. Guy's powerful muscles often proved most useful; as, for instance, when the piano had to be trotted all over the drawing-room, that Muriel and Berry might see it in every possible position, before deciding on its final destination; a weighty question, which was so often brought up and reconsidered, that Guy used laughingly to say he never came in sight of the Vicarage without being anxiously hailed by Muriel, or informed by Berry: "Guy dear, we are waiting for you. The piano just wants moving; *really* for the last time!"

But at length all was in apple-pie order. Muriel's deft fingers had made a little fairy-land of her drawing-room, and all the Mervyns came up to take tea there for the first time; Berry, although she had seen it all before, taking the keenest delight in the

alterations, and exclaiming as they entered the pretty hall: "Oh! isn't it delightful not to see a dirty bit of worn oilcloth, in black and white squares, like a huge chessboard, all over the floor, and Mrs. Drawler's ancient goloshes sitting under the table in the first position; and oh! *how* refreshing, to know that there is not, in the whole house, a single black horse-hair sofa or netted anti-macassar!"

Very bright and blooming looked Cyril's bride as she stood behind her little tea-table, in a simple gown of Quaker gray, her only ornaments the red rose at her throat and her bright, new wedding-ring. She made a pretty picture, as she did the honours of her new ménage with a sweet, shy grace. So Cyril seemed to think, as he proudly watched her from the quiet little corner by the piano, where he had taken his cup, that he might look at his darling undis-

turbed, and observe her every movement, without fear of being noticed, and chaffed by Guy for "spooning." It is so awfully sweet to see your young wife admired by your friends, and hear them say you have brought her back even fairer and brighter than when she went away.

"And how goes the parish, Cyril? You know, the Vicar is expected to report to his patron."

Cyril smiled. "I am getting on," he said. "I have visited every house now, and been very well received on the whole; though I find a certain number of black sheep who evidently consider my calls a rather unnecessary attention, and one or two old dames who seem inclined to instruct me in my duties, after the fashion of the old woman in Punch, who, when the new curate paid her his first visit and seemed rather doubtful how to proceed, said promptly: 'You may read

a Psalm, make a prayer, give me a shilling, and *go !*'"

"Tell them about old Jarge, Cyril."

"Oh, that happened yesterday. You know old Jarge, an ancient individual nearing ninety, with very bandy legs and a very crusty temper? He toddles about by the aid of two sticks, and grumbles at the world in general. When I called at his house, I was told encouragingly by a neighbour: 'You won't get naught out o' Master Jarge.' Well, yesterday, as I was coming home, I saw old Jarge toddling up the hill in front of me. I soon overtook him, and wishing to give him a friendly greeting, called out cheerily: 'Well, Master Jarge, and how are you getting on?' Old Jarge looked pitchforks at me, and snarled out: 'I'm a-getting along as fast as I can.' The poor old chap thought I was chaffing him for his slow pace."

"Have you been to see old Widow Keat?" asked Gertrude. "'Widow Neat' they call her in the village, because her cottage is always so wonderfully tidy. She herself is quite a picture, and so quaint and simple in her talk. I was immensely amused the other day, when she explained to me why she has given up going to see her old sister in Grayley lately. She said: 'Ye see, miss, I did used to walk over and take a cup o' tea with her once in a while; but I ain't so young as I used to be, and it's a long way; and my sister, she makes too much o' me. When I puts on m' bonnet, and bids her good-bye and goes, my sister, she will come to the door, and stand a-watching me right down the street; and you know, my dear'—with an impressive shake of her head—'I don't like *pomp*.'"

"What a fine definition of pomp," said Muriel, laughing; "one old woman watching

another walk down the street! I must go and see her. I love these quaint village characters."

"Well, dear," said Mrs. Mervyn, "you should call on old Mrs. Doles. She is the queerest of all."

"Oh, mother," burst in Berry, "let me tell them about Sally's liver! Mother found Mrs. Doles very full of complaints the other day, about Sarah, her daughter, who lives at home. She said: 'I do wish, mum, you'd take in hand to speak to my Sarah. She's a daily trial to me of a morning. She ain't a bad girl for work when once she's up; but she do love her bed, does Sarah. I may scold and call till I'm tired, but I can't get her up betimes. Maybe if you spoke to her, she 'ud mend her ways. But sometimes I think, 'taint altogether her fault'—here she dropped her voice to a confidential whisper—'I believe it's all along o' her

sluggish liver, for my Sally's got a wonderful sluggish liver.' Mother's face was a study when she turned to lecture the said Sally; and I felt inclined to say: 'Try Beecham's pills, worth a guinea a box!'"

"Poor Sally," said Mrs. Mervyn; "she is really a good, steady girl, but the highest praise she ever gets from her mother is, 'Well, she ain't so bad as she might be.' Now, girls, we must be going; though, Muriel dear, this is all so sweetly pretty, it tempts one to stay too long."

"Yes, I wish some handsome young clergyman would marry *me*," said Berry. "I should love to have a little house like this, and a garden, and a silver teapot of my own, and a fire to poke in peace whenever I liked. One could really put up with a husband to gain such advantages."

"That's one for you, Cyril!" laughed Guy; at which Muriel's sweet eyes sent such a look

over to the corner by the piano, that Cyril devoutly wished they would all go directly.

But when they went, Muriel followed them into the garden, and laid a little detaining hand on Guy's arm.

"I want you a minute."

"Does the piano need moving?" he asked smilingly, as they lingered behind the others.

"No, not at present, as far as I can tell." Then gravely, and looking up into his face: "Guy, have you seen Elaine this afternoon?"

"No," he said; then added, half-hesitatingly, a slight flush passing over his face: "The fact is, I have not been there much lately. It is more than a week since I have seen her; but I hear she is out and about again."

"Guy, she is in great trouble to-day."

He started, and his hand suddenly gripped the top of the gate with an iron grasp.

Muriel marked the movement, and continued, without waiting to be questioned :

" I thought I had better tell you, in case you should look in to see her, and wonder what had happened. This morning I was there, and Elaine asked me to walk a little way with her ; she can't go far yet without an arm to lean upon. We walked across the park to the Mere ; it looks so lovely on these warm autumn days. Arrived there, we unexpectedly chanced on Mr. Monk, fishing. He insisted on taking us a row in the boat. You know he is always rather attentive to me. Elaine got in, but not with very good grace, and sat with her back to him, leaning over the side, dabbling her hand in the water. When we reached that wide, deep bit, where your grounds begin, he rested on his oars, and leaning forward, bent over Elaine. She wore a loose silk shirt, and I saw that his attention was attracted by a thin gold chain

around her neck, just visible as she bent over the side of the boat. Quick as thought he had unclasped it, and poor Ellie's hidden locket lay in his hand. She gave a cry, and tried to snatch it from him; but he held her off with one hand, while with the other he contrived to touch the spring. The locket flew open, disclosing that precious brown curl. He laughed aloud at the sight.

"'Hullo, my lady!' he said. 'Set round with diamonds? This must be a pearl of great price! And do you always wear it next your heart? Now, if only it were black, you could swear it was mine, eh?'

"Elaine was in a fearful state of agitation. She absolutely could not articulate; but she stretched out her hand imploring for it back.

"'Oh, ho! It's very precious, is it? Well, I wonder while his head was at your disposal you did not cut more. This was a most modest little snip. What! you expect me

to return it, do you? No, my dear, that is asking rather too much. Besides, there is plenty more where this came from.'

"He shut the locket with a snap, and before I could prevent him, dropped it over the side into the water.

"'Oh! how could you, how could you?' I cried; 'it was the only curl she had of her baby-boy's hair.'

"His face changed; for a moment a look of compunction came over it. Then he said:

"'Nonsense! Baby fiddlesticks! It was her baby-*lover's!* I am not so green as all that, Mrs. Branscome.'

"But he knew I had told the truth, and I think he was sorry. He looked down into the water, and so did I. It is very deep there, some twenty or thirty feet, I believe; but the water is clear, and for a moment I fancied I saw it. But it was hopelessly gone —gone right to the bottom. Elaine sat as if

turned to stone; but as he took up the oars to row on, she suddenly sprang up, and would have thrown herself over, I really believe, if he had not caught her. Then her grief and despair were truly awful to witness. He forcibly held her down with one hand, and tried to row with the other. The consequence was, we went round and round in the middle of the Mere. At last he told me to take an oar. I obeyed, and so we rowed back. Oh, it was terrible, Guy! I hardly like to tell you. She bit his hand. I think she was beside herself with anger and despair. He was sorry at first, but soon lost patience: and when she bit him, he grew livid with rage; but instead of swearing at her he began to laugh, and say cruel, taunting things, even about that poor little dead baby. That quieted her; but oh, it was so terrible to look at her face! Poor, poor Ellie!"

Muriel's tears flowed at the remembrance.

"When we landed, I dared not leave them alone. I took her home, and stayed as long as I possibly could. I have been on thorns ever since, as to what has happened. I believe that man would kill her, if it were not that he knows she longs to die. Do you know, Guy"—her voice sank very low—"he beats her sometimes—our beautiful Elaine! I have heard him strike her with his riding-whip."

A deep oath burst from Guy's white lips, and he clenched his fist convulsively.

"Oh, hush!" cried Muriel, frightened. "Perhaps I ought not to have told you so much. But she always says you help her so; and I thought perhaps you would go and see her."

Guy controlled himself with an effort. "You were right to tell me," he began in a constrained voice; then he broke down, and caught her by both hands, looking despair-

ingly into her tearful face. "Oh, Muriel! Muriel! what shall I do? what can I do?"

"Guy dear, we can none of us do much," she answered soothingly; "and I know you have done more for her than all the rest of us put together. But we can pray for her, poor darling! and do you know, sometimes I think she will not live very long; and Guy, if only we were sure she was ready, it might be best so."

"Oh, hush!" he said huskily; "not that, not that!"

Muriel looked wonderingly at him. She had never before seen Guy show so much emotion. He saw the look, and forced himself to speak calmly.

"He must have known all along it was the child's hair," he said; "a little golden curl like that. Lord Montague's is raven black, like his own villainous locks."

Muriel could not forbear a half smile, as

she involuntarily glanced at the curly brown hair so near her.

"Perhaps he thinks she has a fair lover somewhere," she suggested cautiously.

Suddenly Guy started, as if an idea had struck him.

"Look here!" he said. "Can you tell me the precise spot where he threw it over?"

"Yes. The bow of our boat was bumping up against the buoy to which you fasten your fishing punt."

"The one opposite the willow?"

"Yes, exactly."

"I say," he cried excitedly, taking off his cap, and tossing back his head; "run in, Muriel, and ask your husband to come out here to me!"

She obeyed.

"Well, old fellow, what now?" asked Cyril.

"Get your hat," said Guy, "and a brandy flask, and come down and manage a boat on the Mere for me."

"My dear old chap, what are you up to?"

"Up to? Well I have a fancy to see whether I am as good a diver as in my old school-days. That is all. Make haste! I shall want a good light."

Two hours later, as Muriel sat on their little lawn in the gathering twilight, she heard the gate swing, and saw Cyril come quietly in alone. He came up, and put his arm round his wife's shoulders.

"Well, darling," he said slowly, "what do you think? Guy has got it."

"Got what?" she cried, clasping her hands. "Not the locket? Oh, Cyril!"

"Yes, little one, the locket; and with its contents uninjured by the water. But I really thought it would have cost him his life; only, poor fellow, he was in such

desperate earnest about it, nothing would stop him. He dives like a duck: but he went down again and again, and could not see it, though he stopped under longer each time. At last he came up so exhausted that I declared I would pull in to shore. But he said: 'I'll go down just once more,' and then he came up with it grasped in his hand. But it was touch-and-go that he ever got up that last time. Fortunately we had brandy with us. He dressed, and then we rowed along and landed on Monk's ground. I happen to know he is away this afternoon and evening at that Grayley cricket-club affair, so we thought Guy might safely take it to her. He is awfully delighted, poor fellow."

"Oh, I am thankful! so thankful," Muriel whispered. Then added, after a pause: "But, dearest, is not all this rather dangerous work for Guy?"

"Perhaps," Cyril answered thoughtfully. "And yet somehow one feels so sure of Guy. He is so different from most young fellows; so true, so simple-hearted, so strong for himself and others. I think he is all right."

"And she?"

"Ah, that is different. Poor Lady Elaine!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

"HER ladyship can see no one," the footman had said with unwavering decision. But Guy was not to be baffled this evening. He knew the coast was clear; so, hoping she might be in the drawing-room, he made his way round by the garden, and came softly up to the window. It stood open.

Guy stepped in.

Yes, she was there. She lay on the large velvet sofa, her face buried in the crimson cushions, her beautiful hair unfastened and flowing over her shoulders. Her back was turned to him. Guy advanced softly and stood beside her.

"For goodness' sake, leave me alone!" she said harshly, without raising her head. "Have I not told you I will be disturbed for nothing? Go away!"

"Lady Elaine, it is I," Guy said gently.

"You!"

Her whole tone changed and softened. She did not turn towards him, but a sudden quietness stole over her restless, weary figure. She lay silent and very still.

"I have brought you comfort, I hope," Guy said, with a glad, proud ring in his voice. "I have really been able to do something for you at last, dear Lady Elaine. When I tell you what I bring, you will forgive my unceremonious intrusion. Muriel told me what had happened, and showed me exactly where your precious locket sank. I am a pretty good hand at diving, and so here it is—quite uninjured, I am glad to say."

She turned in dumb surprise, looking at him with wet dreamy eyes, as if hardly understanding his words. But when he held the locket out to her, she snatched it from him with a wild cry of joy. "Oh, my baby! my little boy! my precious little angel-boy!" Then she caught Guy's hand and kissed it; then turned and broke into floods of silent weeping, pressing the locket to her heart and lips.

Guy could not go. A feeling rose up within him, that just for this once, as he had found her forsaken and alone, he had a right to stay beside her. He knelt on one knee, and rested his arm on the head of the sofa, and a strange sense of having the power to soothe and protect her crept over him; something so new, so wonderful, so passing sweet.

How long he knelt like this he never quite knew; but her weeping ceased, and she lay

so absolutely still that Guy thought she had fallen asleep.

Presently she turned slowly round, with her face towards him. It cut him to the heart to see how ill she looked. She silently put her hand into his—poor trembling hand, so white and thin. His fingers closed over it with a firm, strong clasp.

Another long, sweet silence.

How still the world is outside. *Is* there any outer world? or are they two alone—alone together in God's universe?

A drowsy feeling steals over Guy; he rests his head on the back of the sofa, and gives way to it.

The twilight deepens; the dew is falling silently; one single star looks in through the open window; a rosebud, stirred by the evening breeze, taps softly against the pane.

At length she speaks, in a low, hushed whisper:

"Guy, are we in heaven?"

"I am afraid not," he answers gently; then, very low, "I wish we were."

"It *is* heaven to me," she murmurs, "to be like this, with you, in the still twilight. I never felt such heavenly rest before, to mind, body, and soul."

Surely Guy's guardian-angel drew near just then, and touched him on the shoulder.

He straightens himself suddenly, with a mighty effort.

"I think diving has made me sleepy," he says. "Lady Elaine, I must go."

"Not yet, Guy; not yet! Do you know, I have had such a terrible day! Look here!"

She draws up the loose sleeve of her tea-gown and shows him, on her beautiful arm, the cruel purple marks of five terrible fingers.

With a half-stifled groan, Guy takes that

poor lovely arm in both his hands, and presses his lips again and again to the place where that grip of iron has hurt it.

Another long, still silence. Will either of them ever speak or move again?

Then Elaine, with a sudden movement, flings herself over close to him; so close, that her golden head almosts rests against his breast.

"Oh, Guy!" she says; and her great wistful eyes look up at him, like liquid stars, in the dim light. "Oh, Guy, I am so hungry—so starved for a little tenderness and love! I have to suffer—oh, so bitterly!—morn, noon, and night, till my heart grows chill, and numb, and cold, and I long for rest—sweet rest in a quiet grave. But to-night I am hungry with longing for something better than the rest of death. I want—I want the comfort of a little earthly tenderness. Oh, comfort me, Guy! comfort me!"

She slips her bare white arm up round his neck, and draws his head down towards her. Her soft breath is against his cheek; their lips are almost touching. They gaze into each other's eyes with a world of passionate yearning. In another moment they will be clasped in one another's arms, in an embrace from which no power in heaven or earth will loose them.

But no. Guy gently frees himself from that poor clinging arm.

"*God* comfort you," he says brokenly; then goes out into the twilight, and leaves her lying there alone.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"Guy, they are skating on the Mere!" cried Berry, rushing into the music-room in a great state of excitement. "That splendid frost last night has made it perfectly safe. Lots of people are on. Everybody from The Towers; and you know they have the house full for Christmas with swell people from London, and the men skate beautifully; old Martin says he has heard tell that some of them belong to the great skating club in London. Do come down and cut them all out, Guy dear. And up at the Monks' end they have put out seats, and little tables with refreshments, silver claret-jugs, and no end

of good things; so certainly *we* ought to do something to our part. Now, you lazy boy, put away your old fiddle, and come and see about it, or I declare I'll give orders myself, and go and break my nose on the ice, and you not there to pick me up, so of course one of these charming swells will, which would be quite exciting. Now, Guy, *are* you coming?"

Guy laid down his violin and laughed.

"My dear child, you are in what Gerty calls 'a state of boisterous elation'; be calm. All right. Don't fly at me! I'll come. But are you sure the Mere bears? It was nowhere near it yesterday."

"It is perfectly safe, they say, excepting right up at the further end among the meadows; and Martin says a notice should be put up there to warn people off. But that you must see to, and loads of other things; so hurry up, and come, Guy, *do!*"

Once out in the crisp fresh air of this lovely January morning, Guy's spirits rose as high as Berry's; and as they hurried along over the hard, frosty ground, the sun shining brilliantly overhead, every little twig, every blade of grass, sparkling with countless diamonds, Guy felt that after all this world, which had sometimes seemed very bleak and dull and cheerless to him lately, was a very glorious one, and life was very much worth living. So he strode along, his heart full of gladness, swinging his skates and whistling gaily.

What a powerful fascination skating possesses over the English soul! No matter how grey, bleak, or bitterly cold the outer world may be; no matter how warm and inviting our blazing log-fire, how comfortable our arm-chair, how interesting our last new book from Mudie's, those magic words '*the ice bears*' are a talisman for which

we give up all our indoor comforts, and hasten out, eager for the fray. But then perhaps, like Guy, we are good skaters; and can dash about in fine style, and do the forward roll, and the backward roll, and rocking turns, and loops, and threes, and who knows what else, and all with keenest enjoyment. But why, in the name of all that is rational, should Gertrude, for instance, always so dignified and proper upon all other occasions, insist upon having on her skates directly after lunch, and go struggling about on them the whole afternoon, a spectacle to all men—clinging to poor little Percy Flamingo, who tries manfully to look as though he enjoys it, but suffers inward agonies from the consciousness that he himself is not very steady on his own skates, and that next time Miss Mervyn's feet both slip away in front of her a grand crash must inevitably occur? Percy has often thought

it would be unutterable bliss to hold Gertrude's hand for hours; but now his wish has come to pass, he finds it a doubtful joy.

Beryl is in her element—skimming about all over the place; running into other people in a most unfortunate manner, and having terrible tumbles, consequent on her heroic attempts to do all Guy does, but enjoying herself vastly all the time.

"There, Mrs. Joram! I promised not to upset you, and you see I haven't!" she exclaimed triumphantly, after bringing Mrs. Joram safely across the Mere on a chair. "We did go a pace! Look, we came all the way from over there, where mother is standing talking to Lady Flamingo. This is the only chair on runners. The others don't go nearly so quickly. Now we can sit here and watch everybody. It is such fun! There goes my dear boy. Oh!

I do love to see him doing the backward roll with such a tremendous swing. But, do you know, these London swells actually look quite contemptuously at Guy's skating; and I heard one of them say just now that he holds his leg too high, and swings it, and doesn't point his toe right or keep it near enough to his heel, or skate at all in 'correct form.' 'Correct fiddlesticks!' I nearly said; and I longed to tell him that when *he* skates, he looks like a wooden soldier with his arms and legs fastened by pins to his body, and with no proper joints whatever. He calls himself a 'Moritzer,' whatever that may be! There he goes. Look at him! Now, Guy skates with such freedom, and doesn't give you the idea of having practised for hours before the glass exactly how to hold his foot."

"Well," said Mrs. Joram, following Guy's movements with approving eyes, "I do not

profess to be a connoisseur of skating; but certainly, to my inexperienced eyes, Guy's is far the most full of manly grace. One could not imagine him spending an hour circling round and round an orange, as your friend has been doing—whether for his own enjoyment or the edification of onlookers it is difficult to say, seeing that he himself looks far from happy and his performance is simply annoying to watch. But Guy enjoys himself so immensely all the time that it does one good to look at him."

"Oh, there goes Gerty, grabbing on to poor little Percy! Did you ever see anything more piteous than his anxious, hopeless, cherubic countenance? There! He has suddenly sat plump down on the ice at her feet. Look at Gerty wildly pawing the air over his head. She will be down on the top of him in a minute.

Yes, there she goes! Alas, my sister! How are the mighty fallen!"

Berry chuckled with suppressed delight, and executed little semicircles in front of Mrs. Joram's chair.

"Now Guy has come to the rescue, and set poor Percy free. I'll go and draw him about Gerty, and find out whether that last bump has cooled his passion." And off went Berry.

Just then two skaters appeared who attracted everyone's attention. Mrs. Joram had got up to go home, but paused a moment to watch them. So also did Mr. Monk, who had been figure-skating with his friends since luncheon; and Guy Mervyn, who was assisting his sister's unsuccessful struggles, found her a chair, and stood silently looking after them.

Lady Elaine and Lord Montague had sauntered up a few minutes before; and,

pushing aside the man who hurried forward, he had himself put on her skates, neither of them taking the slightest notice of anyone standing by. Then he rapidly adjusted his own, assisted her to rise, and crossing hands, they started off together, with an exquisite ease and grace of motion, only to be compared to swans moving rapidly through still water.

Every eye followed them as they passed quickly up the Mere, swaying first to one side and then to the other, with a perfect unity of movement, his dark head bent down close to her fair one.

"Very good skating that, Sir Guy," remarked a deep voice at his elbow. Guy turned, and met Mr. Monk's black, sardonic eyes looking at him, half amused, from under his beetling brows. "Quite a pleasure to watch, hey?"

"They are both perfect skaters," Guy

answered, recovering himself; then added, carelessly: "I have not seen them on the ice before."

"Oh no! Not likely. My lord spends his mornings in her ladyship's boudoir. By the way, my young friend, we don't have the pleasure of such frequent visits from you now. How is that? Cut out by the darkey, hey?"

Guy turned on his heel, with a look of unutterable scorn and loathing. Mr. Monk skated on a few yards, to where Mrs. Joram stood, wrapped in her scarlet shawl.

"Nice boy, that," he remarked, following Guy's retreating figure, with an amused expression. "We understand each other—he and I—and get on uncommonly well together."

"Indeed?" said Mrs. Joram stiffly, adding, *sotto voce*, as she walked away: "What

fellowship hath light with darkness, I should like to know ?"

Lady Elaine remained on the ice for over an hour. During that time she skated only with Lord Montague. They passed and repassed close to Guy several times, and once, catching his eye, she turned her head and bowed to him ; he at once raised his hat, and both passed on. She looked very handsome in her rich furs, and much more animated than he had seen her for some months past. Lord Montague talked to her incessantly in a low voice, and she seemed highly amused at his conversation. Guy constantly heard her laugh loudly—a musical sound enough, but one that jarred upon him strangely.

At three o'clock Muriel arrived, skates in hand.

" That's right !" Guy said, securing the skates, and putting her into a chair. " No,

no; it is no good assuring me you really prefer putting them on for yourself. I am a selfish fellow, and won't give up the pleasure. I am glad to see that the dignity of your parochial position does not keep you from this sort of thing"—he looked up at her, smiling.

"No; I can't quite resist the ice yet," laughed Muriel; "especially as I am fairly steady on my skates; so none of our parishioners are likely to witness my downfall! But I am getting on in dignity, for this morning I received a note from a poor woman who wanted help, and it was directed to '*The Rev. Mrs. Branscome.*' So speak to me with due respect, Master Guy!"

"You here, Muriel?"

Elaine stopped close beside them, and laid her hand on the back of Muriel's chair. Guy bent over the skate straps, and did not look up.

"Yes, Ellie! I have come out for a little refreshment after a busy morning. Guy insists upon doing this chilly work for me."

"I dare say he enjoys it," Elaine answered lightly. "If I remember right, he is particularly adept at that sort of thing. He has taken a boot off for me, most neatly, in the days when he condescended to be my '*preux chevalier*.' Well, good-bye. I am going home. There will not be much more sun to-day, and the afternoons soon grow chilly. Where has Monty disappeared to? I must have my skates off."

Guy was just buckling the last strap of Muriel's. He bungled over it, and fastened it very slowly; then, murmuring something about its being too tight, undid and re-adjusted another. Elaine looked at him silently for a moment. Then with a half laugh, and another good-bye to Muriel,

skated on to where Lord Montague awaited her.

A constrained silence fell between Guy and Muriel. He gave her his hand, and they skated slowly a little way. Then Muriel stopped and looked up at him. Most of the skaters were leaving the ice. No one was near them.

"Guy," she said earnestly, "why have you dropped Elaine?"

He did not answer. She went on gently:

"I have noticed for some time past that you two are no longer such friends as you used to be. You never go up there; one never meets you out together. When you are both at the Vicarage, you keep out of her way in a most marked manner. I don't believe she has had five minutes' real talk with you for the last three months. I think she misses it very much, Guy; and it is such a pity. You were the only helpful friend

she had, and I know your influence was strong over her. She said to me once : 'If ever I turn goody, it will be all thanks to Guy.' Since you have given her up like this she has so changed. I can't bear to see her go on with Lord Montague in the way she does now."

"I cannot help that," Guy answered slowly. "Besides—it is no concern of mine." But the emotion in his voice belied his words.

"Well," said Muriel, after a pause, "I dare say I am talking about what I do not understand ; I feel in the dark about you both. But, oh, Guy ! do what you can for poor Elaine."

"That I promise," he answered gravely.

And they skated on.

* * * * *

The ice was almost deserted. The short brightness of the winter's day was over. A chill, cold fog was rising, and darkness

rapidly drew near. Only a few enthusiasts remained, and occasionally loomed in sight of one another through the mist.

Guy would have gone home long before, but troubled thoughts made the rapid movement a relief, and he skated on, hardly noticing how quickly the chilly shades of evening had drawn in. When at last he turned towards the bank, to take off his skates, he thought himself the last to leave the Mere.

But at that instant his attention was suddenly arrested by a terrified cry in the distance—a terrible yell, as of somebody in great danger and distress. It was difficult at first to tell whence it came, the thick mist seeming to confuse hearing as well as sight. He stood still and listened. Again it came, and yet again, more faintly : then he heard no more. Suddenly it flashed into his mind that these cries came from the extreme

end of the Mere, where the ice was dangerous. Could anyone have failed in the dusk to see the notice, and gone in?

Guy started off in that direction as fast as he could skate, and once more distinctly heard the fearful yell for help. At that moment another skater came in sight, advancing quickly towards him. As he drew near, Guy recognised Lord Montague, his fur-cap drawn down over his brows, the collar of his coat turned up around his ears.

"Hullo, Mervyn!" he cried excitedly, wheeling round towards Guy; "where are you going? The ice won't bear up there!"

"I know," Guy answered; "but I am afraid someone has gone in. Have you not heard those cries for help?"

"Come away!" the other shouted hoarsely. "Don't be such a fool as to go there. I tell you the ice is rotten!"

He came close up, and took Guy by the arm.

"Come on, Mervyn!" he said, in an odd, excited manner; "it is beastly cold, and too late to stay out here. Come off with me."

Guy drew his arm away, and at that instant came another long, faint cry.

"There it is!" Guy exclaimed. "You can go, if you like, Lord Montague; but send me down men and ropes, if you meet them."

"Oh! damn you, you cursed fool!" burst out Montague. "Can't you let the devil have his own? Monk is in, through no fault of yours or mine. Her troubles are nearly over—don't spoil her luck! For her sake, come away!"

He skated rapidly on, and disappeared in the growing darkness.

Guy stands rooted to the spot.

In one horrible moment scenes and voices of the past chase themselves in quick succession through his burning brain.

He sees himself struck on the cheek in her very presence by—this man!

He is in the wood, kneeling at her feet, imploring to be allowed to love and worship her, but banished from her presence because of—this man!

He sees a little gold-haired baby, dying in its mother's arms; the mother roughly fetched away, the baby left to die alone by—this man!

Oh, heavens! There, before his very eyes, a bare white arm is waving slowly to and fro, five cruel purple scars upon it, the finger-marks of—this man!

And then he sees Elaine's sweet wistful eyes shine out like liquid stars in the dim twilight, and hears her quivering voice murmur:

"Oh! Guy, I have to suffer so bitterly—

morn, noon, and night . . . . I long for rest . . . . sweet rest, in a quiet grave!"

All this passes before him in one wild moment of agonizing conflict with a temptation brewed surely in the blackest depths of hell: a conflict so terrible that the drops of perspiration stand upon his brow.

Then, with a loud cry: "O Lord, my Lord, be near me!" Guy dashes on over the rotten ice.

* * * * *

Guy never could clearly remember the work of the next ten minutes. It often came back to him like a vague, horrible nightmare: that grim, ghastly face, with its black, matted hair and beard and starting eyes, looking out of the dark water; those gray, numbed hands clutching at the edge of ice which broke away each time beneath their grasp, making that black hole larger and larger—how he lay flat down, and dragged

himself nearer and nearer to that awful face, the rotten ice crunching and cracking beneath him; how, seeing a look of perfect consciousness in those starting eyes, he called out loud and clear: "Float—float on your back, and I will roll you out!"—how the head sank back obediently, and the whole figure rose to the top at the edge of the broken ice; and how, with a stupendous exercise of strength, he rolled him out, while lying flat himself—the ice swaying and sinking beneath their double weight; how, somehow, he dragged him along to where it was stronger, and then gradually to the shore, and found himself at last safe on the bank—the rescuer of Lady Elaine's brutal husband. It all seemed like a fearful dream to Guy, and only came back, in its every detail, long afterwards.

Though almost paralyzed with cold, and unable to articulate, Mr. Monk had not for

one moment lost consciousness. As he lay on the bank, he signed to Guy to feel in his coat-pocket. Guy did so, and drew out a flask full of a strong spirit. This, Mr. Monk signed to him to put to his lips. He swallowed most of its contents; then, with Guy's help, sat up and slowly began to move his limbs. Circulation recommenced; he looked less gray and corpse-like. His first word was an oath.

"Damn that scoundrel!" he said feebly. "He saw me go in—I can swear he did—and he skated off and left me."

At length, with Guy's help, he got on his feet, and they began slowly and with difficulty to make their way to The Towers—Mr. Monk muttering awful imprecations, most of the way, on Lord Montague, the ice, and his own evil soul. When they neared the house, his tone changed.

"Young man," he said, gripping Guy's

hand with his cold one, "I owe you no small debt of gratitude for this. You risked your life for mine; you faced an almost certain death, alone and unaided. How can I repay you?"

Guy shuddered, sickening at gratitude from him.

"I only did my duty," he said coldly.

"Well, most men would have gone off and left me, like that devil Montague. Ha! I will be even with him for this! Yes, Mervyn, from fear of losing their own lives, most men would have left me to die like a rat in a hole. You are a noble fellow!"

They had reached The Towers, and paused on the threshold. The hall was brightly lighted. They could see in, through a side window. At that moment Elaine slowly crossed it—her hands clasped, her head bent, her soft evening dress trailing behind her—utterly unconscious of the two wet, silent

figures standing out in the darkness. A sarcastic smile played on Monk's face at sight of her.

Guy turned towards him.

"Listen!" he said. "A year ago, *I* should have left you there to die, like a brute as you are, that your black soul might go to the devil you serve. I should have left you—not from fear of the danger—but to free her whose life you have blighted. To-night I have saved you, because I serve and love that God whom you blaspheme. He is my Lord and King. I saved you at His bidding. Thank Him—not me."

An absolutely satanic smile passed over Monk's face.

"Much obliged for the hint," he said; "but I will trouble neither you nor Heaven with my undesired thanks. But gratitude is due to you, Sir Guy, and you must receive it. No, don't turn away. Come

in, and let my lovely wife thank my preserver with her own sweet lips."

For an instant Guy's clenched fist was raised to fell him to the earth. Then he turned, and rushed away, never stopping to draw breath till he stood within the hall of his own house.

He staggered into his own little study, and fell down on the rug, in the flickering light of the bright log fire. Then he suddenly cried out in bitter anguish : " Elaine, Elaine, Elaine !—Oh ! forgive me, my darling—for Heaven's sake, forgive me ! O my God !"

And when Berry rushed in, at the sound of her Guy's voice, she found him lying cold and senseless on his study floor.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"'Lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come,'" quoted Muriel, as she stood in her garden, looking out over the wooded landscape, and enjoying all the spring loveliness around her. "It seems to me that no other words ever written so perfectly express a day like this. Don't you think so, dearest?"

Cyril looked up from his gardening.

"Quite true, dear," he said; then added with a smile: "Many a time, in bygone springs, I have longed to finish the verse: 'Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.'"

Muriel blushed, laughing in joyous happiness, and laid her hand tenderly on his shoulder.

"What a lover you are still, old boy!" she said, with a ring of shy pride in her voice.

"*Still?*" echoed Cyril. "Didn't you think it would last eight months, even? If so, I wonder you trusted to it at all."

"Oh! I knew the *love* would last, darling; but—well, I think I was afraid we should have grown more matter-of-fact in our way of showing it; and it is very sweet to find we don't. Here comes Guy. Now *do* go on with your planting, and keep the nice thing you are going to say for when he has gone. Come round here, Guy, and see what improvements Cyril is making in the garden. Isn't it a lovely morning?"

"Perfect," Guy answered, crossing the little lawn and joining them. "I have been riding ever since breakfast; and now I have

come up for an important consultation with the Vicar, over Pitman's estimate for cleaning and doing up the church, and one or two other private matters. Can you spare me an hour of your valuable time?"

"Willingly, my dear fellow," answered Cyril, sorting out packets of seeds. "Just let me finish these, first; I have been sowing seed in the infantine rustic mind for over an hour this morning, and came out to this easier and more satisfactory work as a little relaxation."

"How you work at that school!" Guy said. "Isn't it rather a grind, going there every day?"

"I only go three times a week," Cyril replied. "And it is well worth it. Getting to know the children well gives one such a hold over the parents; besides, it improves the whole tone of the school when the master knows one is often in and out. No; teaching

them is not always dull work. I sometimes get most original answers. This morning a little chap gave me the queerest I have ever known evolved from a child's inner consciousness. I was speaking on the usefulness of various animals; for instance, cows give milk, hens lay eggs. 'Now, then, of what use are pigs?' A small boy answered promptly: 'Pigs lay sausages.' Was it not a bright idea? Now, I will go in and clean up; and then we can talk in my study."

Left alone for a minute with Muriel, Guy said, half hesitatingly:

"I think you will like to know I am going to The Towers this afternoon. I met Lady Elaine this morning, and she stopped me, and asked about the fund for doing up the church, and said she should like to subscribe to it. She seemed really interested, so I volunteered to call and explain all we propose

doing. She asked me to come to tea. I am going there at four o'clock."

"I am so glad," Muriel answered. "Guy, I am *so* glad. Oh! do try to speak of higher, better things. She is so difficult to talk to now. I think she has given herself up to a kind of settled hopelessness. She very rarely says much to me; but sometimes she comes here and talks in a wild sort of way about all being over soon. And then another thing makes me very anxious-- " Muriel paused and hesitated.

"What?" asked Guy. "Do tell me. You can trust me, can't you?"

"Guy, I am certain she has seen Lord Montague again, somehow. You know he has never dared show his face at The Towers since that horrible affair in the winter. But I know she has met him lately, or at all events heard from him; and Cyril has been told that he is stopping at an inn, ostensibly

for the fishing, in a little village somewhere the other side of Grayley. Oh, Guy, I feel so troubled and unhappy about Elaine!"

"Listen," said Guy, in a low, firm voice. "I want you to make me a promise. If ever you know her to be in any trouble, or difficulty, or immediate danger, from that scoundrel, or anyone else—really needing a strong hand to help her, and save her from herself or others—will you send and let me know?"

Muriel hesitated.

"But what could you do, Guy? Besides, you are so young; and——"

"I am young, I know," Guy answered firmly, looking straight before him as he spoke; "but I am older, years older, than I was six months ago, when I had to confess myself unequal to the task of being her friend. Now, I feel—I know—that there is nothing I could not do for her in time of need. So

promise me, promise me, Muriel; for, strangely enough, I, too, felt this morning, as you do, that an undefined shadow is hanging over her. If you find out before I do what it is, promise to let me know."

She looked into his manly face, from which so much of the gay boyishness had vanished since that fearful evening on the Mere. Then she said, simply:

"Yes; I feel glad to promise."

* * * * *

Guy and Elaine sat talking in her drawing-room.

They had not been alone together there since that October evening, so long ago. Both remembered it; each wondering, perhaps, how far the other did also.

It was April now, but unusually warm for the time of year, and the window stood wide open, just as it did when Guy had stepped in to restore the lost locket.

She found him changed, and yet would have been puzzled to define exactly how. In a way he seemed further off from her; and yet into his tone came much more tenderness than ever in those last months of their friendship; and not, as then, the reluctant tenderness of one who fights against a love he cannot wholly conquer and subdue, but rather the great pitying tenderness, born of a conscious strength, which gives to the weakness which has drawn it forth a yearning unutterable to lean upon it evermore.

She, also, seemed to Guy much changed; but it was a change he could account for, and had seen coming over her months ago. He knew full well that, unless aided by Divine grace, unless softened by heavenly love, such a life as hers must harden her, and gradually stifle and quench all that was most womanly and lovely in her. Harder in outward manner she certainly was; and yet as they

talked she slowly warmed and melted; a gentleness, infinitely touching, came over her, and she gazed at him with strange, sad eyes, as of a woman who looks her last upon her dead. He felt intuitively that some presentiment of coming evil hung over her that day. An incessant restlessness possessed her. Five times in the last half hour she had changed her seat; and now she lay back among the sofa cushions, twirling her wedding-ring with her thin white fingers, and looking at him with those large, sad eyes full of unshed tears. It grieved him to the heart to see how frail and ill she looked.

They had concluded church matters long ago; and now he sat talking low and earnestly of heavenly truths; pleading with her to seek after the only thing which could bring her comfort and rest—the peace of God which passeth all understanding; the precious love of Jesus, which alone can fill

and satisfy the hungry heart; the indwelling Presence of the Holy Spirit, Who alone can rule and guide the life aright. He talked to her as he had never done before; for Guy himself had learnt much during these last few months. With his whole soul he pleaded with her to trust in his dear Lord, yielding up whatever kept her still so far away from Him.

She listened in silence—sometimes looking vacantly out of the window, sometimes fixing her eyes on his face; but all the while restlessly twirling that thin gold ring. At last she leaned forward and spoke:

"Guy," she said brokenly, clasping her hands convulsively across her breast; "oh, Guy, I understand—yes, I understand it all now; and you must let me speak out freely to you just this once, or else my heart will break! Oh, Guy! you are so good, so true; you have always stood so nobly, and never flinched or failed. The one good thing in my

poor life is having known you. Yes, I believe in your dear Lord. You have indeed proved to me what He can do for you. I often made it so hard for you; but He brought you out more than conqueror. And now you are so strong and brave, so high above me, that you can afford to come back, and stretch out your hand even to me, and try to raise me to these unknown heights. But no, Guy, no! Peace, joy, love, rest, alas! are not for me. Only—remember—when I stand before God's judgment seat, a poor, lost soul, I shall point to you standing on His right hand, and plead as my one redeeming point: I knew—I loved—Guy Mervyn."

Then Guy did what he had never done before: he knelt down and prayed with Lady Elaine. Long and earnestly he pleaded for her with his Lord; and silently her tears fell all the time, and her sad wide-open eyes were fixed upon him.

"Oh, my Lord, give her Thy rest—Thy peace. Oh, come Thyself and make all clear. Oh, show her, show her that the greater the need the greater the Saviour. Jesus, put Thine arms about her, for Thou knowest"—his voice trembled and broke—"Thou knowest I feel so powerless to help or protect her."

He bowed his head on his arm, and knelt there, silently, for several minutes; then rose, and went over to the window.

Such a spring freshness was in everything. The birds were twittering joyously as they built their nests, though only another hour of their short day remained.

Presently Elaine joined him, and leaned against the window-frame, her fair hair stirred to and fro by the gentle breeze. Guy turned to her with a sudden flash of joy in his eyes.

"Look!" he cried. "Doesn't it all speak

to us of hope, of promise of newness of life? Oh, yes! I know He has heard and will answer, and do for you all we have asked."

He bid her good-bye, and held her hand for a minute in his firm, strong clasp; then left her, and went on his homeward way with glad hope in his heart, and a greater inward peace, and vivid consciousness of the Presence of his Lord, than he had felt for many a long day. Yes, he left her—little knowing what hung over her; little dreaming how soon they two should meet again, or how he would see her next.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Towards nine o'clock on that same evening a strange fit of uneasy restlessness came over Guy. He could settle to nothing. After a vain attempt to read to his mother and the girls, he got up, and whistling for Bidger, went out into the open air.

It was a chilly night. The great, still moon rode proudly along through a cloudy sky. The cool air refreshed him, and he bared his head as he paced up and down the moon-lit lawn. Bright log fires blazed in the drawing-room and in his own little study; for Mrs. Mervyn insisted that the evenings were still too chilly to leave off fires. He

could see in at the windows. In his study his violin and books lay on the table ; everything was in considerable confusion, just as he had left it. In the drawing-room his mother was seated near the lamp, working ; Gertrude, always inclined to complain of cold, reading a book with her feet on the fender ; and his little Berry doing nothing in particular, but anxiously watching the door for his return, and evidently being sharply reprimanded by Gertrude for fidgeting.

A strange sense of being somehow outside all this, and in another world, came over Guy ; a solemn feeling of preparation for an unknown something drawing near him—nearer, nearer every moment.

He left the lawn, Bidger following closely at his heels, turned down the drive, and came face to face with Muriel in the moonlight.

" Guy !" she cried breathlessly. " Oh, Guy !

what shall we do? I am so terrified. I was coming to fetch you."

She stopped, panting for breath, and looked at him with white face and frightened eyes.

Guy uttered but one word: "Elaine?"

"Yes," she said hurriedly, "I am afraid so. Listen, and I will tell you quickly, for there is no time to lose. Cyril was sent for to that sick man at the farm. He is away to-night, so I went. Coming back through the dark lane near the fir-woods, I heard horses approaching. I drew back into the shadow, that they might pass by. Only one had a rider, a tall man, muffled in a dark, military cloak. He led the other horse by the bridle: it carried an empty side-saddle. They paced by me very slowly. As they passed, the moon came out from behind a cloud, and shone on the rider's face. Oh, Guy, it was Lord Montague!"

Guy seized her arm.

"How long ago was this?" he cried.

"Barely ten minutes. I ran all the way here. What shall we do? What shall we do?"

"With God's help we will save her yet!" he said. "Listen, dear; try and be calm. Go in and tell my mother I met you, and told you to say I had gone to someone in trouble. Don't say more, if you can help it. You and she wait up till I come back, but not the girls. And, oh! Muriel, pray hard!"

He pulled his cap firmly down over his brow, and dashed off with fleet footsteps across the park. Muriel saw him take the short cut to The Towers, and disappear into the wood, followed by Bidger. Then, trying hard to still her beating heart, she stepped into the house to do his bidding.

On Guy sped in the darkness, never stopping for one instant. Through the wood,

where the night breeze whispered in the trees, and strange fantastic moonlight shadows peered out from behind their dark trunks; past the old beech-tree; over the stile at a bound; across the cornfield; in at the park gates, and up the long white avenue, Bidger scudding a black shadow before him. It is a race, not for life, but for something far dearer than life to him—the honour of the woman he had loved. Will he be in time? oh! will he be in time? He turned the last bend in the drive; the house came full in view, and Guy's heart stood still with a sickening dread.

The whole household was astir. Lights moved rapidly to and fro in the upper rooms. Dark shadows passed and repassed against the blinds. The hall door stood wide open.

"My God!" he groaned, the cold sweat breaking out upon his brow. "She is gone, and they have missed her already!"

He leaned against the grey stone portico. Bidger crept up close to him and licked his hand.

A footstep in the hall. The butler came to close the door. He started violently as Guy stepped out of the shadow.

"Oh, Sir Guy! Your pardon, sir; I did not see you." He held the door open deferentially.

Guy entered. A cold shadow seemed to hang over the house.

The dining-room door opened, and, to Guy's surprise, Dr. Thompson of Grayley came out, closing the door again carefully behind him.

"Ah! Sir Guy," he said in a low confidential tone, rubbing his hands together, and advancing with a look of supreme self-importance. "Terrible affair this! Most sudden and unlooked-for. By a strange chance, or perhaps we should rather say, a

most remarkable dispensation of Providence, *I* happened to be dining in the house. But how quickly the news has reached Mervyn Hall. It only took place half-an-hour ago. I have just sent a mounted messenger to Grayley for the family solicitor. Best thing to do under the circumstances; eh, Sir Guy? Most fortunate I happened to be here!"

Guy forced himself to speak calmly.

"What has taken place, Dr. Thompson? I have not heard."

"Taken place? Not heard! Why, my dear Sir Guy, it is most appalling news. Mr. Monk—*my* host—master of this place—fell *dead* half-an-hour ago, over his own dinner-table; his empty wine-glass dropping from his hand! Sudden apoplectic seizure! all over in ten minutes! never knew anything so sudden in all my professional experience. Needless to say all was done that could be, *I* happening fortunately, by a most

strange coincidence, to be actually on the spot. Awful affair, Sir Guy!"

Guy turned to the butler.

"Where is your mistress?" he asked quietly.

"Her ladyship cannot be found, Sir Guy. They are seeking her high and low. She had left the dining-room ten minutes before it happened, and I saw her enter the drawing-room."

Guy went there promptly, followed by the doctor. The room was empty. The window stood wide open.

"Dr. Thompson," Guy said calmly; "I have no doubt Lady Elaine has gone out into the grounds. Please see that no disturbance is made, or she may hear this awful news too suddenly. I will find her, break it to her gently, and bring her in."

He stepped out as he spoke, closing the window behind him.

Then—

"Find her, Bidger!" he cried. "Find Lady Elaine!"

The intelligent dog sniffed about for a moment anxiously; then, with a short, sharp bark, started off across the lawn, straight towards the dark fir woods beyond, Guy following close behind.

* * * * *

After Guy left her on that afternoon, Elaine had continued standing motionless, leaning against the window. One by one the little birds ceased twittering, and gently went to rest. A stillness fell over all. The sun slowly vanished, and a chill breeze began to stir among the trees. But like a marble statue stood Elaine, watching the little white clouds moving across the sky, and the great calm moon rising behind the wood. Then suddenly she clasped her hands and flung them up above her head.

"No, no, no!" she cried. "I cannot do it; I cannot do it! Monty, you may wait and wait, but I shall not come. To be cut off from *him* for ever is too heavy a price to pay for freedom; to lose this sweet, dawning hope of higher, better things. I will bear my curse, and wear my chain, and some day—some day, rest will come."

She passed into the darkening room, and flung herself upon her knees, where Guy had knelt, sobbing hysterically: "Guy, Guy, you have saved me—saved me!" Then with clasped hands and upturned face, she cried:

"O God, O God! for Guy's sake pity *me!* Save me from myself—from Montague!" Then she knelt on in perfect stillness, breathing a wordless prayer, a silent cry, for the help she so sorely needed.

Presently she rose, went out once more, and stood watching the silver moon, now

high above the trees. A strange, unearthly calm stole over her.

"I am going to be very ill," she said aloud, smiling dreamily, and passing her hand across her forehead; "very ill. Perhaps the end is drawing near. How dark and black the fir-wood looks. I wonder how long that poor boy will stand waiting there?"

Within, the drawing-room clock chimed seven, and a gong sounded.

She turned in at the window, singing softly—she, who had not sung for years:

"Rest comes at length; though life be long and dreary,
The day must dawn, and darksome night be past;
Faith's journey ends in welcome to the weary,
And heaven, the heart's true home, will come at last.'

* * * * *

Two hours later, when she left the dining-room, an unbearable restlessness took possession of her. She paced up and down the room with clasped hands, looking every

moment at the clock, and then out over the lawn to the dark woods, where she had promised to meet Lord Montague.

"If I could only let him know I am not coming!" she murmured. "If I could only send him word! But he will wait—wait—wait, till he grows mad with suspense and impatience; then, perhaps, he will come and hang about the house, and be seen by—— Alas! what shall I do—what shall I do?"

She wrung her hands, and moaned wearily, still pacing up and down, to and fro—to and fro.

"Poor boy! poor boy! He will wait, and wait. He will think they have locked me up—killed me, perhaps. O God, if he comes up here, there will be murder done to-night!"

She stood still, shuddering, and looked around with a startled, terrified gaze; then listened, as if petrified, while the clock slowly

struck nine. Then she caught up a white shawl, and flung it over her head.

"I must go to him," she said. "I cannot let him wait out there, and wonder why I do not come. If he is very angry, perhaps he will kill me, and I should be so glad."

She glided out of the window, and fled noiselessly over the soft turf, like a pale spirit from another world.

* * * * *

Lord Montague waits in the dark fir wood. He has fastened his horses to a tree, and, with folded arms, stands like a black sentinel beside them.

The moment of his triumph is drawing near. The woman he has loved for years, and sworn to have and hold, by fair means or by foul, is almost his. How late she is! Will she never come? What if she fails him at the last, as she did before the altar ten long years ago?

He bites his black moustache in desperate suspense, steps into an open space, where the moon shines brightly, and tries to see his watch.

Suddenly, she is beside him.

With a stifled cry of rapture he catches her in his arms, and holds her to his breast.

"My bride! My love! My darling!" he whispers passionately. "I thought you would never come. Hah! this time we are not baffled. In a few short hours we shall be far from this cursed place, and you will be free; mine at last—mine—*mine!*"

He holds her at arm's length to look into her face; then starts back in surprise.

"Evening dress, Elaine! Bare neck! Nothing on your head! My dear girl, you can't ride like this!"

Then she speaks—slowly, with an absent, dreamlike voice:

"I am not going with you, Monty."

"Not going!" he cries. "You are not going! In heaven's name, what do you mean?"

"I am not going with you, Monty," she repeats mechanically. "I am only here to tell you so."

He comes close up to her, his face pale and determined, his eyes flashing.

"Elaine," he says; "are you mad?"

She looks calmly at him, with sad, wistful eyes.

"No, dear," she answers, passing her hand wearily across her brow; "I don't think I am mad—but I am very ill. I want to be at rest. Only I could not let you wait on for hours in this dark, cold wood, wondering why I did not come. Now I must go back."

"Listen," Montague says through his clenched teeth. "The only rest for you this night, Elaine, will be in my arms. You don't befool me twice!" Then, more gently:

"Come, Ellie, mount! We have no time to lose."

His violence awakes her from the dull lethargy into which she has been slowly falling. She steps back from him, drawing herself up to her full height, and throwing back her queenly head with a gesture of scornful surprise.

"Is that how you speak to me?" she demands. "I tell you, I will not go! I will die first!"

"We shall see!" cries Montague, with an oath, springing forward and catching her in his arms. "You have played with me long enough, sweet cousin. My blood is up now. You had better give in quietly."

She struggles, and breaks free.

At that instant the underwood behind them sways and crackles, and Bidger bursts through into the open. Then words spoken years before by Mrs. Mervyn rush back to

Elaine's mind. 'Whenever you see Bidger, you may be quite sure his master is not far off.'

"Guy!" she shrieks. "Guy, come to me!"

With a rapid movement, Lord Montague's right hand goes to his breast coat-pocket; but Guy has sprung out behind him, and seizing him by the elbows, drags back his arms, and pinions them with a grip of iron.

"Elaine!" he cries, and his voice rings out strong and clear in the still night. "Take the revolver out of his left breast-pocket!"

"Touch it if you dare!" hisses Montague, gnashing his teeth, and foaming in impotent rage. "Leave go, you damned young blood-hound! What business have you here? She is mine, not yours; curse your impudent interference!"

Elaine hesitates, trembling. For a moment they all stand silent in the moonlight—a strange group, truly. Montague's dark,

desperate face and writhing figure—Guy, at his back, every muscle strained to hold him fast, looking over him at Elaine. She, with clasped hands and white, terror-struck face, shivering in her low, thin evening-dress, her golden hair, disarranged in the struggle, flowing loosely on her shoulders; Bidger, crouching on the ground, his sharp teeth gleaming in the moonlight, ready to spring at a sign from his master.

"Take the revolver from him!" repeats Guy again, firmly. She comes a step nearer.

"I must do it, Monty," she says piteously. "Oh, do give in! I will never go with you; never, *never!* I would sooner die. I must do as Guy says."

He glares at her, and swears a fearful oath.

With trembling hands she draws the revolver from its hiding-place.

"Now go behind me," Guy cries, "and hold it ready. Bidger, on guard!"

He flings Lord Montague violently forward, and bounding back himself, snatches the revolver from Elaine's hand.

Montague staggers to his feet, and turns upon them; but Guy, six paces off, is covering him with a steady hand.

"Come one step nearer," he cries, "and I fire!"

Lord Montague stands sullenly at bay.

"Well," says Guy sternly, "your game is up. You may as well be off."

But Montague makes one last desperate effort.

"Ellie," he says passionately, "don't let this young blackguard come between us! Think how all these months I have waited patiently for you to keep your promise and go with me. Think of the living hell your life is now, tied to that old scoundrel yonder. I can save you from it all. Ellie, you know you love me, and I—I worship

you! I will live for you, die for you! Only say one word—say you will go—and I'll risk his cursed bullet, and get to you."

She stands silent, motionless, at Guy's side; and answers not.

Then Guy speaks, in low, gentle tones. "Lady Elaine, if I were not here, would you go with him now?"

"Never!" she whispers, with lovely, quivering lips. "Never!"

"You have your answer," Guy says sternly. "Go!"

Elaine draws closer to his side. He passes his left arm round her, and supports her with a strong, firm clasp.

"Baffled," mutters Montague between his teeth. "Damn you both!"

He strides off to his horses, unfastens the bridles, mounts, and disappears into the darkness.

They stand and listen in unbroken silence.

Presently they hear the sharp trot of his horses' hoofs upon the hard highroad, fainter and fainter, till they die away in the far distance.

Then Guy lays down his weapon. "Thank God!" he says. "Thank God!"

But she?

She draws away, and stands there, with clasped hands, before him, her head drooping, the glow of shame dyeing her pale cheek crimson. What must he think of her; he—so noble, so pure, so true? How low she must have fallen in his eyes! She is filled with a desperate yearning to lay her golden head in the dust at his feet and bid him trample on her. And she stands with clasped hands and drooping head, and waits for him to speak.

But what is this? Guy's strong young arms are round her. She looks up, trembling. He is gazing down at her, a world of tender,

passionate love in his eyes. What! O God, is Guy going to fail her now? Has she, in falling, dragged *him* down? Will she ever believe in truth and goodness in this sad world again if *he* is like all the rest? She tries to shrink away from him, but he detains her gently.

"Don't be frightened, Elaine," he says. Oh, the tenderness of his tone! She gives in trustfully at once, and rests her head against his shoulder like a tired child. "I have something to tell you. It must be told now; but it is awful news. I want you to lean on me, and try to listen calmly."

His arms are tightening round her. She can feel his heart throbbing. Will he ever speak again? But what news can matter much to her now? She is in Guy's arms; heaven and earth may pass away. The moon shines on her upturned face. The night breeze whispers in the fir trees, and cools her

burning brow. All is so still, so restful, and she is in *his* arms. She tries to see his face; but Guy is looking upward now, and she can only see his lips quivering with intense emotion.

He speaks at last. His voice, though very low, is firm and steady.

"Lady Elaine, the Lord has set you free. Your husband died suddenly, not an hour ago."

She springs up, and stands, with parted lips and wide-open eyes, before him

"*He——dead?*" she shrieks — "DEAD!" then flings her arms above her head, crying: "Free—free!" and falls senseless on Guy's breast.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"She fainted, Dr. Thompson, when I told her the news, and has shown no sign of life since. I carried her straight in here. For heaven's sake do something; bring her round somehow! She can't be dead! You don't think she is dead?"

Guy looked despairingly at the white, motionless face. Dr. Thompson bent over the sofa, and felt Elaine's heart and pulse.

"Dead? Bless you, no, my dear sir! You don't understand women and their little ways. They always faint at sudden news, be it good or bad; and between ourselves, Sir Guy, I should be sorry to be called upon

to decide whether this poor lady has fainted from joy or sorrow. Either way, we will soon bring her round ; but I don't think you can do much to assist me. Are there no women-folk in the house, eh ? Just send her maid here, and more lights, and some brandy, and leave her to us, Sir Guy. I will soon revive her. Most providential I happened to be in the house !"

The little doctor's matter-of-fact, bustling manner was an absolute relief to Guy at that moment. He rang for Elaine's maid, ordered the lights and brandy, then went to her writing-table, found a pen and some pink scented note-paper, such as he had never in his life used before, and hurriedly wrote :

" Mother and Muriel, both of you come at once. Monk is dead. She is unconscious. She can't be left here alone, with no women about her. Mother, *come, for my sake,* and come prepared to stay."

"Now then, Sir Guy! I am afraid we cannot have you here any longer."

"All right, doctor. I shall be in the hall."

Guy went out, and called the butler.

"Look here, Smith. I am sending for my mother and Mrs. Branscome. Have this note taken to Mervyn Hall at once. Perhaps you had better send over the brougham, and it can wait and bring them back. The sooner they get here, the better."

"It shall go at once, Sir Guy." The man took the note, then hesitated. "Please, sir, I think you should know, before the ladies come"—he pointed to the closed dining-room door. "*It* lies in there."

For twenty minutes Guy paced up and down the hall, his mind divided between anxiety to know how they were getting on in the drawing-room, and terrible thoughts of that ghastly thing Smith had called *it* lying

so near him; thoughts of the man summoned thus suddenly into the presence of the God he had unceasingly blasphemed; his power for evil, his chances of good, all over now. Guy's mind went back to that awful winter evening on the Mere. There arose before him a mental vision of that grey, fearful face and horrid, starting eyes; those numb, cold fingers clutching at the broken ice. "Does he look like that now, I wonder?" He put his hand on the dining-room door. An irresistible impulse came over him to enter and see. Then he shuddered and turned away, and again paced slowly up and down the hall. But as he passed the window, Monk's sardonic face and evil eyes peered in at him from the darkness. "I must see how he looks now." Once more he stopped before that closed door.

"No, no, Sir Guy! I don't recommend your going in there," whispered Dr. Thomp-

son, coming out of the drawing-room at that moment. "It is not exactly what one would call a pretty sight. In fact, my dear sir, it is only fit for doctors and undertakers to look upon, and the sooner they forget it the better. Besides, you are wanted in here now. She is conscious again at last, after a fashion, but talks very wanderingly, and understands nothing we say to her. I fear it may be a long business. She must be got to bed, and someone found to nurse her. But just for the moment you had better go in. She keeps asking for you."

"I have sent for my mother, doctor. She will be here in a few minutes."

"Ah! first-rate. Just the thing. Can't be left with servants at such a time. Poor thing! Very friendless, I believe. Wealth and beauty 'aren't everything in this poor world, eh, Sir Guy?"

As Guy went in, the maid passed out, and

he was left alone with Elaine. He knelt down beside the sofa, and took her hand gently in both his own. She looked up at him with great frightened eyes.

"Guy, is Monty gone?"

"Yes, dear. Don't think any more about him. You are safe now, thank God!"

"Then do put down the pistol, Guy; it frightens me. I don't want him to be shot."

He bent over her in troubled silence, not knowing what to answer.

"Oh, don't be so angry, Guy," she pleaded, large tears chasing one another down her cheeks. "I never meant to go; but I couldn't let him wait—wait—wait—forever, in that dark, cold wood. Could I, Guy?"

"No," he answered soothingly. "But it is all over now, Lady Elaine. Try to forget it."

"Then put down the pistol, Guy!" she persisted, looking at him in terror.

"I have, dear. I left it behind in the wood. Now, do lie still, and don't talk. Perhaps you will go to sleep."

She laughed feebly, and stroked his hand.

"Dear old boy! How funny of you to expect me to sleep while all these birds are singing. You know I love the spring. I am going out into the sunshine."

"You are very ill," he said, bending over her, with a look of anguish. Then a low, agonized cry broke from him: "Oh, my darling!"

"Hush!" she whispered, laying her hand over his mouth. "Hush, my boy-lover! You must behave well, or we can't sit together under the old beech-tree any more. I shall have to send you away; and that would be so sad, because I have no one else, and should be left all alone—so lonely. Why are you so late to-day? Who did you say was ill?"

"You are ill, sweet," he whispered brokenly; "and I don't know what to do."

She smiled up at him, gently passing her thin white fingers through his hair.

"Yes," she said dreamily; "I know I am ill, very ill; but I have been that a long time; only there was nobody to see or care. But never mind, Guy dear. Oh, it will be so sweet to die, and lie quite still under the grass and flowers, and rest forever by the side of my dear little dead baby! And he will creep close into my arms, *so* close, like he used to do in the twilight, when I lay down on his little bed and sang him to sleep. And I shall have all his sweet brown curls to kiss, instead of only that one tiny one; and we shall be so happy—my baby and I—for he loved me, Guy; though you might not think it, he really did. You see, I was his mother, that was why."

She paused, her face lit up with a joyful

tenderness, such as he had never seen there before.

"Dear little lamb!" she murmured. "He will be so glad to have his mother again. And his sweet head, resting on my breast, will ease the dull, cold aching there; and never more shall I be hungry for a lover's kisses, when my own baby's lips are pressed to mine. Yes, darling, mother is coming to her little boy."

A terrible sob broke from Guy's heaving chest, and one large tear fell on her hand. She looked at it bewildered.

"What is the matter, dear?" she said. "You wouldn't mind, Guy, would you? Even you had to give me up at last, you know, when you found you could not make me good. You see, it was *love* I needed, not sermons. My little baby can't talk, but he will love me, and I shall soon grow good."

"Hush, hush!" he whispered brokenly. "Oh, I can't let you die!"

He hid his face in his hands and groaned. She stroked his hair again, gently, and looked at him with wide-open, wondering eyes.

"Why not?" she asked.

Guy knew she could not understand him; but to relieve his breaking heart, he answered her.

"Because I love you!" he said passionately. "Because you are all the world to me; and I love you as never woman was loved before!"

She laughed, a weary little laugh, and shook her head incredulously.

"Oh no, Guy, no!" she said. "You are making a mistake. You are much too good to love such as I. No, it is Monty who loves me like that; poor Monty! Oh, don't let him wait on in that cold, dark wood after

I am dead! Tell him to go away, for I shall never come—never come."

The sound of rapid wheels; a flash of carriage-lamps past the window.

"Thank God, they are come!" Guy rose from his knees, and went out into the hall to meet them.

"Mother—Muriel," he said hurriedly, "she is very ill—dying, perhaps. Come in and see what you can do for her."

He brought them in; and they stood by the sofa silently for a moment, while Elaine looked at them with a puzzled expression in her large, hollow eyes. They rested on Muriel first, without the slightest recognition; then passed to Mrs. Mervyn. Suddenly a flash of pleasure and surprise dawned in them.

"Why, mother!" she said. "It is my mother!" Then wistfully: "Am I really at home again?"

A moment's silence. Then, with a rush of tears, and an irresistible impulse of tenderness, Mrs. Mervyn knelt down, folded her motherly arms round Elaine, and rested that weary head upon her bosom.

"Yes, poor child," she whispered; "you are at home."

And at that sight Guy turned away, a choking sensation rising in his throat, a thankful joy glowing in his heart.

"Blessed little mother!" he said. "I knew she would not fail me."

* * * * *

"Die, Sir Guy? Die! Oh, nonsense! Never say die! No, no; we will pull her through. Mind you, I don't say she is not ill. She is very ill, poor lady; and I should say this has been coming on for some time past. It may be a long job, but with good medical attendance, and such a nurse as your mother, why, my dear sir, we are bound to bring her

through. Die? Oh no, we won't talk about dying; for, between you and me, life will be more worth living for her now, poor soul! Going home? That's right. Have a good tumbler of port, and tumble into bed. That is my advice; for you have had rather a night of it, eh? I shall act upon the old song, and not go home till morning. Good-night."

Guy grasped the cheery little doctor by the hand, and went out at the hall door full of hope and comfort.

He had carried her upstairs for them, and laid her on the sofa in her room; and suddenly she had grown more conscious; for as he was leaving her she had called him back, and signing him to bend down, had whispered: "Guy, is it really true? *Is he dead?*"

"Yes," Guy had answered; "he is dead, and you are safe and free."

"Safe and free," she repeated, and closed her eyes and lay quite still. And he had taken one last, long look at her; and then, stooping, had gently kissed her hand, and left her to his mother.

As Guy walked down the drive, the stable clock struck one. What! Could it possibly be only four short hours since he started on that breathless race to save Elaine? Did ever so much happen in so little time? No wonder he felt half bewildered, as when one wakes from a mad careering nightmare, in which the mind has been dragged from scene to scene and horror to horror with headlong speed! This quiet walk home, in the cool night stillness, was the best thing possible for Guy. He began to collect himself and clearly to arrange his thoughts.

Yes, Monk was dead; Montague was baffled; and she was safe, with his own mother left to watch by her bedside and care

for her. Very ill, no doubt; but had not Dr. Thompson spoken with absolute certainty of her recovery? Then his heart grew very light, poor boy, and his face very joyful. As he walked, he began to plan out all that the future would bring for her. What a changed new life she would awake to, when this illness was safely over! How easy it would be to talk to her of heavenly joy and peace, now her dark chains were riven and her torment ended at last! She must go away as soon as she was well, and get a thorough change from the scenes of her sad sufferings. He would get his mother to come, too, and—take her himself.

He bounded joyously over the stile, and up the steep path to the old beech-tree. Suddenly, the sight of it recalled to him her wandering words. What had she called him? "My boy-lover!" Yes, he had been that once; but what is he now—now in the

strength of his young manhood? Now, to-night, what is he to her—to the woman he loves? For the first time in these four terrible hours Guy thinks about himself. Till now his whole thought and care have been for her; but now it dawns on him that this night's work changes *his* life as well as hers.

"Her lover!" he cries. "Yes, I *am* her lover: and have the right to be! Oh heavens, she is free! I may love her, think of her, dream of her, without sin or shame. I may seek to win her to be my——" Guy leaned against the old beech-tree, and bared his head, and looked up to the dark, purple sky above him. "My wife!" he said solemnly, in low, deep tones of rapture. "Elaine, my wife. My *own*, to love and worship, to care for and protect; mine, before all the world. Always beside me day and night; no evil, or fear, or trouble daring

to come near her ; her lovely weakness leaning on my strength ; I, who have been so powerless to help or comfort her, now able to make her whole life glad and bright ! Oh, my Sweetheart, my Sweetheart ! Are you hungry for a lover's kisses ? You shall never be hungry more ! Do you want strong arms around you ? They shall be round you evermore. If only you knew, just now, *how* your 'boy-lover' loves you ! Elaine, my love, my darling ; will you really some day be——my wife ?"

He uttered the last words almost reverently ; for, God knows, this was the first time such a thought had entered Guy's true heart; ay, the very first, though he had loved her for years.

He strode on homewards, a surging, rapturous joy throbbing in his veins. He felt so strong for her ; so certain he could win her for his own ; so grateful to his Lord,

who had kept him free from any sin or shame concerning her; so that now he could gladly bring her all the pure, fresh love of his heart, and pour it at her lovely feet and lavish it upon her evermore.

Lawford had waited up, and opened the door for him. "What will you take, Sir Guy?" he asked, looking anxiously at his young master. "I have laid supper in the library."

"Supper?" Guy said; then with an effort recalled himself to things terrestrial. "All right, Lawford. Don't stay up longer. I will help myself. Don't shut the door; leave it wide open. I like the air. I will close it presently."

"Not much amiss, anyhow," thought the old butler to himself, as he deferentially answered Guy's joyous good-night.

A pile of logs blazed in the great hall fireplace. Guy turned out the lamp, and stood

in the firelight, leaning his arm on the oak mantelpiece. Somehow supper sounded much too commonplace for him just now; the moonlight streaming in at the open door, and the fitful firelight rising and falling and making queer shadows in the old hall, suited him better than the bright wax candles in the library yonder.

Lawford's retreating footsteps had died away.

The house was wrapt in perfect silence; the strange, unearthly stillness of that hour.

The great hall clock struck two.

A dark shadow stealthily drew near, and stood within the doorway, obscuring the moonlight.

Guy, his back turned, saw it not. His eyes were fixed on the fire; his mind was full of happy thoughts.

"When shall I see her again? When shall I dare to tell her how I love her?

What will she say? Will she understand at once all I want to be to her? When shall I first dare to kiss those sweet, sweet lips, and hold her in my arms?"

The black shadow entered noiselessly, drew near, and stood with folded arms on the opposite side of the hearth, waiting in silence.

Suddenly Guy became aware that he was not alone, and starting from his reverie, found himself face to face with—Lord Montague.

"You here!" he cried, springing back and standing on the defensive. "You villain! What brings you here?"

"Not what you seem to think," the other answered quietly. "I am not here for revenge, Guy Mervyn. Far otherwise. I have come to thank you."

"Thank me?" Guy echoed incredulously.

"Yes," said Lord Montague slowly, looking him steadily in the face as he spoke. "I

met the messenger returning from Grayley, and heard the news. I have come to thank you for preventing me from taking by force what will now, thank heaven! be mine by right. My cousin and I owe you a heavy debt of gratitude, Sir Guy. You have saved my honour and her good name. When she is my wife, we shall both remember all we owe to you."

For a moment Guy stood speechless. Then, recovering himself, he said coldly:

"I do not desire your gratitude, Lord Montague; and as to Lady Elaine, I do not suppose she will have much more to say to you, after your blackguard conduct of to-night."

He spoke decidedly; but a ghostly dread crept up and laid its chilly finger on his heart. Montague watched him narrowly.

"You mistake," he said quietly. "She loves me."

"You lie!" cried Guy, with white lips. "You lie, I say! She could never love such as you!"

Montague's dark eyes flashed, but he kept his arms firmly folded across his breast.

"Has she not given proofs of it this night?" he asked calmly. "Although her courage failed her at the last, she had *meant* to fly with me. She had meant to be my mistress, since she could not be my wife."

The blow told cruelly. Guy writhed beneath it.

"Villain!" he shouted. "How dare you speak so of her to me! I know she never loved you. Half mad with despair at her hopeless lot, longing after freedom at any price, she may, in a weak moment, have listened to your infernal suggestions. More than that I will never believe. Begone—while my hands are off you!"

But Montague firmly stood his ground.

"Apparently you love her yourself," he said coolly. "I thought as much; and therefore felt it only due to her, to you, and to myself that, under these altered circumstances, you should know the truth. You doubt my word? Perhaps you will believe hers. I suppose you know her writing?"

He took an open letter from his pocket-book and handed it to Guy.

"Read that," he said; "and perhaps, when you have read it, you will understand that Lady Elaine's happiness depends on *me*, not you; and you will consent not to molest her, or seek to win her from me. She might give in to you, from helpless gratitude; but her heart and love are mine, and always will be. Read!"

Guy's first impulse was to dash back the paper in his face; but at sight of the hand-writing he knew so well, his courage failed him. O God! could there be truth in this?

He must know. Mechanically he took the letter from Montague's hand, unfolded it, and read it by the flickering gleam of the log fire.

Alas, alas! that the treacherous light does not show him that the ink is faded, the paper yellow. Alas! that no one is by to point out that the letter is not dated. Alas! poor Lady Elaine, that you never owned to Guy that Montague was the lover of your girlish days.

With dizzy brain and reeling head, Guy reads. He cannot force himself to go straight through, but he sees a sentence here and there.

"*Yes, I know you love me, Monty; I know you are my own true lover, and I love none but you. . . . Yes, I will meet you, if you can arrange it; and you shall take me away. . . . Anything will be better than life with him; besides, I love you, Monty, so I shall be quite glad to go. . . . I know you will make me*

happy. . . . I don't exactly like the idea of eloping, but that can't be helped. . . I hope my courage will not fail me when the moment comes. I must think of Mr. Monk's odious face. . . . Oh, be sure you come and save me, dearest. . . . I shall be happy with you."

Sick at heart, Guy reads no more; but turns to the signature. How often he has read that name in his little Bible, traced in the same delicate handwriting! He reads it now at the close of her letter to Lord Montague—"*Your Elaine.*"

Silently he folds it and returns it to its owner.

"Well?" Montague says sardonically; "do you believe me now?"

No answer.

He walks over to the door, and stands like a dark spectre in the silver moonlight.

"Well, Guy Mervyn? Do you leave her to me or not?"

Then Guy speaks, in slow, measured tones, each word wrung from him by bitter inward torture.

"I leave her to you," he says. "She is not worthy of a true man's love."

The dark shadow moved away, leaving the doorway free.

Once more the moon shone in, over the old oak floor; the red firelight glowed in the dark hall, and all was still and silent in the house.

The clock struck three.

Then Guy turned, and walked slowly into his own little dark study and shut the door.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"May I have my flowers, Mrs. Mervyn?"

"Certainly, dear. I am sorry they have been forgotten. Spencer shall bring them in."

Elaine's couch was drawn up near the window, so that the fresh morning breeze could blow upon her, and that she might see the tops of the great trees waving, and the white clouds passing across the bright blue sky. She took an almost childish pleasure in every little thing, now she was strong enough to look about and enjoy the beauties of this early June weather. If a little bird perched on her window-sill and sang, or

another rosebud opened on the climbing-tree outside, it gave her an exquisite, simple pleasure, and she would lie and smile to herself for hours after.

She was very weak still; and lying there, in her white tea-gown, with closed eyes and folded hands, she looked like a pale marble statue, still and motionless. But the worst was over—those long, long weeks of hand to hand fighting with death, when even sanguine Dr. Thompson grew silent, and came and left without one little cheery joke. But he had kept his word to Guy. They had pulled her through; and now for some time she had been in that condition—generally more trying to nurses and doctors than the worst of the illness—the condition known as convalescence. But Elaine's convalescence, far from being trying, was a pleasure to them all. She was so patient, so sweet, so grateful; never in the least

exacting to those who waited on her. A strange calm had come over her as soon as the fever was past and reason returned; an absolute rest of mind and body. She assented gently to all they said, took all they gave her, asked only one question: "Is it true that he is dead?" and when told that he was, lay quietly back and inquired nothing more.

When the day came for her to be moved on to the sofa, she roused up for a moment to say: "Please dress me all in white;" but after that took no further interest in any outward things, but lay quite still, her eyes closed or fixed with a far-away look on the waving tree-tops and blue sky.

"I wish you could rouse a little, dear," Mrs. Mervyn had said one day, bending over her anxiously. "You don't seem to notice anything going on about you; and yet Dr. Thompson says you are much

stronger, and ought to be making real progress."

Then Elaine had smiled up at her, and taken her hand lovingly in both her thin ones.

"Mother dear," she had said—she still sometimes kept to the name she had called her all through her delirium—"I think I am just resting. Not living, or moving, or thinking; but just resting. You see, for years I have had no rest of heart or mind, and I had grown, oh! so weary. And now all that is over, and I am at rest. And I feel as though I must lie just as still and quiet as if you had laid me away under the grass and flowers."

So they let her have her quiet time of rest; only sometimes Mrs. Mervyn used to think those dark-fringed lids would never lift again, those white folded hands never move.

But by degrees she began to rouse and take more notice.

"I love to hear the birds sing," she had said one morning as soon as the window was opened; and all that day her mind was full of them. "Do listen," she said, over and over. "Oh, how they sing! Isn't it heavenly?" Another day she said: "I wish I had some flowers."

"Well, dear," answered Mrs. Mervyn, "you can have as many as you please. Numbers of friends have sent them for you every day but I could never get you to notice them. We will send Spencer for those that have come to-day."

So, by slow degrees, she grew better, and at last one day said to Mrs. Mervyn, with a bright little smile: "I have done the resting, and now I am beginning to *think*. Perhaps soon I shall get on and *talk*; but not quite yet."

On this particular June morning she seemed very bright; and when Spencer

brought in her flowers, she took them eagerly, and began reading the cards attached.

"Dear old Mrs. Joram, how sweet of her to remember me! I was often cold and unpleasant to her, I am afraid."

"She calls constantly," said Mrs. Mervyn, "and begs to see you. Perhaps a visitor would cheer you up and be a little change, dear. Would you like to see her?"

"No," Elaine said gently; "not yet. I don't feel able to see anybody yet but you and Muriel. Besides, Mrs. Joram is such a talker; it tires me only to think of it."

"Yes, it would not do to begin with her," Mrs. Mervyn said. "Who would you like for your first visitor, dear? Is there anyone you have a special wish to see?"

"No one—yet," she answered; and then the pink flush slowly rose in her pale cheeks, a little wistful smile played about her lips,

and she turned her face to the window and lay very still.

"Have you all you want, Elaine? I am going over to the Hall this morning. I must go as often as I can now, to see that our little Berry does not run too wild."

"Oh, how good you are to me!" Elaine cried, with a rush of gratitude. "Who but you would have stayed on here all these weeks, watching over me as tenderly as my own mother might have done? Dear Mrs. Mervyn, they must need you so much at home now. Ought you not to leave me and go back?"

"No, my dear child, I certainly shall not leave you here alone. But I have thought of a much better plan. As soon as you are well enough to be moved, you must come home and stay with us."

"At Mervyn Hall?" Elaine said, looking up in delighted surprise.

"Yes. The girls will love to have you, and wait on you. So now make haste and improve, and perhaps, before so very long, Dr. Thompson will give us leave to move you. He says himself, a change of scene would do wonders."

Left alone, Elaine turned quickly to her tray of flowers, and throwing aside many larger and rarer bouquets, took up tenderly one little bunch of yellow roses, carefully tied together with a bit of string. She touched and smelt each one, laying them lovingly against her cheek and lips; then, with a happy little smile, examined the rather clumsy knot, and passed her white fingers over it; then lay back on her pillows, a wistful look in her sweet eyes, and the precious little bunch clasped to her bosom.

They came each morning, these yellow roses—always tied with a piece of string;

always without name or message attached. They had appeared the very morning after she had first asked for flowers, and she had recognised at once the yellow climbing rose which grew in such profusion over Guy's study window. So this little bunch of roses was the one great pleasure of her day, and she lay for hours toying with it, and thinking —thinking.

"Yes, they must be from *him*—oh, Guy, my boy-lover! A little daily sign, to show he has not forgotten, to show he has forgiven. How shall we two meet, the first time, I wonder? How will he look? What will he say? Will his voice be low and tender, and his big hand strong and gentle? Will he understand all I shall be feeling, and longing to make him know? All the shame and remorse for my past failure and weakness? all the passionate gratitude of soul to him for having stood so faithful,

and been so strong, and at last saved me from worse than death? Oh, what will you say to me, my boy-lover, when we two are alone? When you see how frail and weak I am, shall I again hear your strong, tender voice saying: 'Dear, lean on me'? Shall I feel those firm arms tighten round me, and hear that brave, true heart throb loud and fast?"

Her last recollection of him was when, in the fir-wood, he took her in his arms to tell her the awful tidings. All that followed was a blank to her. Try as she would, she could remember nothing. But every moment of that terrible night-scene stood out with vivid clearness in her mind; and as she thought of it, a desperate shame would rise within her. "Oh, I am so unworthy that he should ever speak to me—think of me!" But then she would recall the tenderness with which—Montague gone—he turned to her. Yes, surely love was shining in his

eyes. Oh, it was the look—the well remembered look—of her boy-lover!

And so she would lie happily back, toying with her yellow roses, and dream—and think—and—pray.

"Why, Elaine, you look so much better this afternoon! Dear child, you have quite a colour! The prospect of a change has done you good already."

"Yes," she said, smiling, "I am much better. And do you know, dear Mrs. Mervyn, I am going to follow your advice, and ask for a visitor."

"A visitor? That is right, dear. We are getting on! Well, have you thought who it shall be?"

"Yes," Elaine answered. "I should like to see little Berry."

"Beryl!" Mrs. Mervyn looked surprised and doubtful. "I am not sure that you have

made a wise choice. Don't you think Berry is a little too boisterous for such a quiet room as this has been ?"

"Oh no—please," pleaded Elaine. "It is just Berry who will do me good, with her bright face and merry voice. Do let her come, and do let me see her alone."

"Very well, dear. It shall be as you wish."

Berry was alarmed and awe-struck at the honour conferred upon her. She came along the passage on a frantic tip-toe, far more creaky than an ordinary footstep ; and stood outside the door in agitated suspense, wondering what on earth was the right thing to say to anyone who had been so terribly ill as poor Lady Elaine.

"Don't say you are glad she didn't die," Gertrude had remarked sarcastically, when Berry sought her advice. "And don't run to the opposite extreme, and talk as though

she is perfectly well. Arrive at a happy medium, my dear Beryl, if you can attain to such a thing, and make a little suitable conversation for an invalid's sick-chamber. I wonder she did not ask for me, sooner than such a tom-boy as you are."

"I wish to goodness she had!" Berry had ejaculated fervently. "But perhaps you would tell me some suitable conversation for a sick-chamber?"

"Oh no!" Gertrude replied. "Certainly not. You must judge for yourself."

So now poor Berry stood on tip-toe outside the door, searching back into the past for sick-chamber conversations.

When Guy was ill, years ago, she almost lived in his sick-room, and he used to say: "Jupiter Ammon! hang this beastly gruel!" or "Look here, little one; tell Gerty to put this mustard plaster on her own nose, and leave me in peace!" But these remarks,

though no doubt very much to the point at the time, were not of much assistance now.

However, when Berry gently opened the door and carefully creaked in, and saw Elaine lying on the couch, so frail and white and lovely, with such a sweet smile of welcome, and her thin hand stretched out, she threw all anxiety about a happy medium to the winds, and knelt down by the couch, and took that thin white hand in both her own brown ones and kissed it, saying : " Oh, dear Lady Elaine ! I am so awfully glad you are better."

" Yes, I am much better," she said, smiling at the bright face and sparkling eyes turned to her. " Dear little Berry, how good of you to come so soon ! Do you know, I have wanted to see you for a long time."

" Now, have you really ?" Berry exclaimed, delighted. " You know, that's curious ; for Gerty says I am a most unsuitable person

for a sick-room, and just the very last *she* should have selected. Not that I ever do trouble Gerty's sick-room much; because, you see, it is anything but an inviting place. Instead of enjoying the nice little change of staying in bed for a few days, and having beef-tea and jelly and new books, and mother always hanging round, and feeling so important and interesting, Gerty grows crosser every hour, and pulls the bedclothes right over her nose, and looks out with one indignant eye, and scolds at everybody who comes near. So I make myself scarce."

Elaine laughed.

"I hope I have not been at all like that," she said. "For, oh! Berry, your dear mother has been so kind and good to me!"

"You—groaning and grumbling, and sporting an indignant eye!" Berry laughed merrily at the idea. "Oh no! Mother used almost to cry when she came home and told

us how sweet you were to nurse, and how patient, and so thoughtful for her and everybody else, even when you hardly knew what you were doing. I am sure she has loved nursing you, dear Lady Elaine. I used to wish I might come and help her. You know, I am not a bad nurse, on the whole ; at least, Guy says—I mean, mother says—that is—oh, I have forgotten what I was going to say !"

Poor Berry's flow of conversation had been arrested by a sudden recollection, and she floundered hopelessly for a minute. Then, catching sight of the yellow roses lying on Elaine's pillow :

"Oh, I am so glad you like those !" she said. "I was sometimes afraid they were hardly worth bringing, when I saw the piles of lovely flowers in the hall."

Elaine's voice trembled a little.

"Are they from you, Berry dear ?"

"Yes. I picked them myself every morning, and brought them round. Mother told us you had asked for flowers."

"Thank you, dear," Elaine said gently. "They have been such a pleasure to me."

Ah, but *what* they had been, no one would ever know. She lay quite still for a minute; then said quietly:

"Tell me, Berry; how is Guy?"

"I think I ought to go," said Berry in agitation. "You are beginning to look so tired; and mother said I must not stay long enough to tire you."

"Beryl!" Elaine cried, with white lips, "what is the matter? Why should you not answer my question? Is Guy ill?"

"Oh no, he's not ill," said Berry, looking vainly round for a hope of escape, but not liking to break away from that poor, thin, detaining hand. "Well, I'll tell you, Lady Elaine. Guy has gone abroad again. He

waited until you were quite out of danger, and then—he went."

The room is very still for a minute. Even the birds outside seem to hush their singing. Then Elaine speaks slowly, in a low, weary voice.

"Good-bye, dear little Berry. I am glad you came. Now you had better go; for I am very tired, and I want to be alone."

Berry crept noiselessly away; but at the door she just looked back, and saw Elaine half turn towards the window and lie quite still, looking with lovely tired eyes at the blue sky and waving tree-tops.

"Oh, Guy," Berry thought within her little heart, "my dear boy—if only you could see her now!"

But Guy, alas! was far away.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"I ALWAYS think," remarked Gertrude complacently, "that this is quite the nicest hour of the day, when we all meet together after our various occupations are over, and have tea out here under the trees."

"And for once I agree with my elder sister," said Berry, cutting a huge slice of cake for herself and a more delicate one for Lady Elaine. "And I vote we compare notes as to what our 'various occupations' have been, and see who has spent the afternoon most profitably. I'll begin, being the youngest and most important member of the family. That blessed old music-master from

Grayley, having sciatica, or lumbago, or something or other which kept him away, my whole afternoon was free; so——"

"I hope you practised in the lesson-hour, Berry dear," interposed Mrs. Mervyn.

"Well now, mother, do you know, that idea never occurred to me. What a pity! And such a natural thing to think of, too! Wasn't it? Well, not being gifted with such bright ideas as mother, I blessed the lumbago, and shut the piano, and rushed off to the church to see Cyril marry the butcher to that pretty girl from the farm, Oh, it was such fun! The butcher looked radiant. His face literally shone; so did his hair, for he had oiled it fearfully. He wore a chimney-pot hat, which he carried up the church under his arm, and apparently couldn't get rid of. When the service began he stood grinning at the bride, and rubbing his unlucky hat round and round the wrong way; Cyril had

to sign to the best-man to take it from him and place it on a seat. Then he had a tremendous hunt for the ring; and when found at last, after turning out all his pockets twice over, while everyone stood in solemn silence, it was done up in six separate wrappings of silver paper. Dear me! I wouldn't have married that butcher for a good deal! However, the bride didn't seem to mind. But the finest thing of all was when he had to put the ring on, and endow her with all his worldly goods. He executed a sort of right-about-face movement, and gazed at her in greasy rapture, repeating each sentence enthusiastically after Cyril; but when it came to 'I thee endow,' he said, with great emphasis, 'I thee *adore!*' I nearly roared, it was so comical; and poor Cyril had hard work to finish the service—especially when he saw Muriel's pocket-handkerchief up, and me shaking. His mouth kept twitching, and

he looked awfully as though he was eating sour gooseberries. I admired him for being able to go on at all."

"Well, I wonder Cyril ever lets you go to the weddings," said Gertrude. "You always behave shockingly. You laughed during the whole service when poor old John was married to the housekeeper the other day."

"Well," cried Berry indignantly, "and who wouldn't have laughed, to see old John standing nervously on one foot, and then shuffling on to the other, and saying: 'Yessir! yessir! yessir! 'Zactly! Just so!' Everything in the world but '*I will*,'—which poor Cyril was vainly endeavouring to make him say; and finally he fell back on his baptismal vows, and said: 'That is my desire!' And I believe Cyril let that pass."

"And after the wedding, Berry? What

did you do next?" asked Lady Elaine, who always enjoyed Berry's voluble fun.

"Then I called on dear old Mrs. Joram, who sends you her love, and wants you to go to tea; but I said you were not strong enough yet for such extreme dissipation. And I teased Podge, who hates me like poison; and I went to the pantry and got a rise out of old Patterson. He is a regular character. It is such fun to hear him talk to Mrs. Joram. He has an aggravating way of pointing his whole conversation with a sort of bracketed remarks thrown in *sotto-voce*. If she blows him up in the middle of one, he waits patiently till she has done; then goes on just where she interrupted, and conscientiously finishes it. She scolded him for something or other to-day; and I heard him say to himself afterwards: 'Peter Patterson, it is morally certain that any other man would give notice and leave. But you took her for

better, for worse, five-and-twenty years ago come Michaelmas, and you must abide by it!' I like the old boy. He always calls me 'Miss Brill,' and smiles on me affably. So you see, I have had a useful day. Now, mother, what have you done?"

"I don't know about *useful*, Berry," Mrs. Mervyn said; "except that you have furnished our tea-table with a good deal of amusement. I have been in the village, visiting."

"Whom did you see, mother?" inquired Gertrude.

"Most of the old bedridden people: they find this hot weather trying. And I went to Mrs. Doles about her husband coming on to do a little work here. He will be thankful for it, poor old fellow! He can only manage something quite light."

Mrs. Mervyn smiled involuntarily, as at some queer recollection.

"Oh, what is it, mother?" cried Berry. "An odd remark of Mrs. Doles'?"

"Yes; her last cause of complaint. But really, it hardly bears repeating."

"Oh, do tell us, mother; do! I know Lady Elaine is longing to hear it!" cried Berry eagerly.

"Well, she was very despondent about her husband, and finally she said: 'He ain't good for much — my poor old man. Ye see, mum, he's not got a bit of inside left!'"

Berry burst out laughing.

"My dear mother, how could you meditate keeping such an astonishing fact about old Doles to yourself! I shall make a special expedition down the park to-morrow to see such a walking phenomenon!"

"And what have you been doing, Elaine?" Mrs. Mervyn asked, turning to her with the peculiarly motherly smile her kind face

always wore now when she spoke to Lady Elaine.

"Only resting, I am afraid," she answered; "because I want so much to get a little way into the woods, after tea, and I have been saving my strength for that."

"Is it wise, dear?" Mrs. Mervyn said anxiously. "Remember how your last walk tired you."

"I think I can manage it," she answered, "if Berry will come with me until I find a seat. Even this lovely garden is never quite the same to me as the great silent woods."

"Oh, I'll come!" said Berry, proud and delighted.

* * * * *

Elaine sat alone under the old beech-tree, the sunlight shining down on her bent head; in her hand a very precious book—her little lost Bible, which had so long been Guy's.

A week ago, when she came to stay at Mervyn Hall, Berry had shyly brought it to her room, saying: "I found this put away in one of Guy's drawers. I believe it used to be yours, so I thought, perhaps, you would like it." It did cost her a sharp pang to find that even his treasured little Bible had been left behind, because *her* name was in it, and it reminded him of her; but her poor heart had had so many such-like pangs, that one more or less made little difference; and when she saw how full of marks and notes Guy's Bible was, she took it up eagerly, hoping to trace his thoughts in some of them. And so it came to pass that much of her time was spent over this little, well-worn Bible; and by degrees she forgot Guy in all she found out about Guy's Master—the dear Lord he had talked to her of so often, yet without awaking in her heart any responsive desire to know Him for herself.

One of the first words that caught her eye on the very evening Beryl brought it to her —that sad, hard day when she came to Guy's home, where Guy was not—the first line she saw was a question: "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?*" Against this Guy had scribbled on the margin: "Heb. xiii. 5, 8." She turned to it and read: "*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*"

How both verses went home to her poor lonely heart! "*Separate from love.*" How entirely one could be separated from the only human love one yearned for! Was there indeed a love to be had from which nothing could separate? "*Forsake*"—oh, had not her boy-lover forsaken her? Rightly, no doubt, for she was not worthy of him; but, oh! it is so bitter, so cruelly hard to be forsaken. "*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*"

She knelt down by the open window. The yellow rose growing outside Guy's study reached to her window also, and its sweet scent was wafted into her room. All was so still and holy around, on that lovely summer evening. She looked upwards, with clasped hands and tearful pleading eyes.

"Oh, Guy's dear Lord," she said, "to-night, for the first time, I feel my need of Thee. I was not worthy of my boy, and he is gone; I am not worthy of Thy love, but Thou hast promised never to forsake. Oh, teach me—give me hope, that some day I—even I—may find Thee, as Guy did."

Each day since then she had searched into that precious Book, and found the richness of the treasure it contained; but somehow, though hope dawned bright in her sad heart, she scarcely knew how to appropriate these promises—how to make this free forgiveness,

this love of Christ, this peace of God, her own.

Now, sitting in the sunlight, under the old beech-tree, she pondered over this, and yearned exceedingly to be able to say: "He is mine."

"Oh, God," she cried, "give me light, give me light! I *must* have Thee. My heart is empty. Thou hast taken away the earthly prop I leaned upon; oh, come to me Thyself!"

She opened the little Bible, and her eyes fell on a deeply-marked passage. It was a verse she knew very well; but now it came to her with new meaning: "*God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" Against this Guy had written, in pencil: "*God's part. My part*, 2 Cor. ix. 15." She turned quickly to the verse and read these simple

words: "*Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.*"

"*My* part!" she repeated. "Yes; that is my part, and I have never done it! He has done His part; the gift is offered—given, and I have never thankfully received it."

Then, her pale face lighting with a sudden joy, Elaine looked upward to the clear blue sky.

"*My* Lord," she whispered, "with all my soul I thank Thee for Thine unspeakable gift. I take it gratefully, and *now* believe that, all undeserving as I am, Thou hast loved me, and given Thyself for me."

Oh, the sudden rush of restful joy! She leaned back with closed eyes. At first it seemed almost to overwhelm her. Then she opened the fly-leaf of Guy's little Bible, and repeated softly to herself four lines he had written there—lines which she had often read, but never, until now, understood; and

as she said them, her happy tears fell softly, and blotted the page.

> "Jesus, I am resting, resting
> In the joy of what Thou art;
> I am finding out the greatness
> Of Thy loving heart."

That evening Elaine wrote a little note to Guy, and sent it in his mother's next letter. It ran thus:

"I feel I must tell you, Guy, that at last your dear Lord is mine also; and I have found the 'peace of God,' which truly 'passeth all understanding.'

"Gratefully yours,

"ELAINE."

A few days later, when Berry brought up her breakfast-tray, a note lay upon it directed in a firm, clear hand. She knew it was Guy's answer.

When Beryl had gone down, she opened it and read :

"DEAR LADY ELAINE,

"I thank God with all my heart. It was good of you to tell me. I am awfully glad.

"Yours ever,

"GUY MERVYN."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BERRY sat in the schoolroom, with the door locked, having a real good cry.

It was not often Berry cried; but when she did, she settled down and did it thoroughly.

"You see," she used to say, "snivelling a little, and dropping elegant tears into a pocket handkerchief, may do very well for Gerty; but it's no manner of use to me. I have to get a bath-towel and go in for a regular howl before I feel better."

On this particular afternoon, Berry's "howl" had been a very thorough one,

judging by her poor swollen little nose and red eyes. Presently she got up, hung her pocket-handkerchief over the back of a chair to dry, and, with a very mournful but resolute face, laid out her writing things on the table.

"I can't help it," she said; "I must do it. I have never disobeyed my boy before; but now I must, for his own good. Dear me! that is just what mothers say when they are going to make their little children's lives a burden to them for the next half-hour;—and oh, it grieves me to do it;—the mothers say that, too; which isn't much comfort to the poor little wretches who are going to be walloped! Perhaps he will be very angry and never trust me again, and take Gertrude into *my* place"—Berry's tears flowed afresh at this terrible prospect—"and say I have failed him and broken my promise. But oh, I can't help that! Just because I love him

so much, I must brave his anger and risk the consequences."

This sounded rather well; and Berry repeated it over several times, while she arranged her paper and chose out the least scratchy of her pens; somehow it gave her courage. Then, twisting her feet up on the bar of her chair, and laying both elbows well on the table, she began a letter to Guy.

"My own dear old Boy,

"If you knew *how* I've been crying I think you'd be sorry for me, especially as it is all about you. That big blot on the B is a tear; but it is the last I mean to shed, because I love you *so* much that I have quite made up my mind to brave your anger and risk the consequences! Guy dear, I am going to *disobey* you for the first time in my life. Oh, you *will* remember that I have never, never done such a thing before!

Even when I was quite little and very wicked, and used to stick up mother's bonnet and cloak and umbrella and make faces at them and say 'I won't' by proxy, because I didn't quite dare to do it to her face; even then, Guy dear, I always faithfully obeyed *you*. Now, didn't I? And oh, my blessed boy, if I disobey you now and break my promise, it is only *for your good!*

"You remember that you positively forbade me ever to say a word in my letters about Lady Elaine? you said mother would tell you anything you needed to know, and I was never to mention her name. Guy dear, this whole letter is going to be about her; because something has happened which, I am sure, you ought to know, and no one else but me will ever tell you. I will write it as quickly as I can, because any way it will take a long time. I have stayed away

from a lovely tennis tournament, so as to have all the afternoon alone, on purpose. (Perhaps this will soften your heart.)

"I suppose you know Lady Elaine is staying with us; and oh, I have learnt to love her so! but never mind about that. Well, yesterday, directly after lunch, she went into the woods, to spend the whole afternoon under the beech-tree (she likes being there better than anywhere else). At about three o'clock, just as I was going upstairs after my bothering music-lesson, I heard a ring at the front-door bell. I hid behind the column to see who it was; and when Lawford opened the door, there stood Lord Montague. He asked for Lady Elaine, and Lawford told him she was out, and he believed she had gone into the woods. 'Thanks; I will go and find her there,' he said, and strode off quickly.

"Guy, I was dreadfully troubled at this,

because Lady Elaine is not strong yet, and if anything gives her a shock or frightens her, it makes her faint directly. But I could not stop that dreadful Lord Montague from seeing her: so I thought I would run round to the beech-tree another way, and hide, so as to be near in case she wanted anyone. He must have walked as fast as he could go, straight down that mossy path; for, when I came in sight of where Lady Elaine was sitting, though I had run all the way, he was already with her. I hid among the hazel-trees and watched them. I could not hear what they were saying: but he stood before her talking very fast and eagerly, and she got up and leaned against the trunk of the beech-tree with folded hands, and listened quietly to all he said. She looked very pale, but quite calm; and her eyes were fixed steadily on his face. At last he paused and she spoke. Just then they moved and began

to pace slowly down the path towards where I was. I could not hear what she said, but I heard his answer, for he called out bitterly: 'It is because you love Guy Mervyn! Oh, I know that well enough, Elaine! You can't deceive me!'

"She stood still in the middle of the path and looked up at him. 'I have no wish to deceive you, Monty,' she said quietly. 'Yes, you are right. I do love Guy Mervyn; and I care not who knows it. My love for him is the best and purest thing in my poor wasted life. Oh yes; I love Guy Mervyn.' She looked up so proudly as she spoke, and the sun shone on her golden hair and white dress. (She always wears white now.) Lord Montague stood dumb before her and said no word. For a minute she stood so, looking away through the trees with a wonderful joy in her eyes. Then she turned to him and went on, in a lower tone: 'But apart from

my love for *him*—apart from the fact that now I never could love you as you wish—my answer would be the same, Montague. Love and marriage are not for me.' She turned, and they slowly paced back towards the beech-tree. 'Why?' I heard him ask passionately. She answered, speaking low and earnestly. What she said I could not hear. Lord Montague's whole manner changed. I saw him catch her hand in his and hold it against his breast, and stand looking down into her face. Oh, Guy! I suppose he is a bad man, but I think he loves her terribly. I shut my eyes, for I couldn't bear to look at him then. I think if he had wept, his tears would have been blood! Whatever it was she told him, it convinced him that he must give her up for ever; for again they came my way, and I heard him say brokenly, 'I wish to heaven I hadn't troubled you, Ellie.' 'Never mind, dear,' she answered

sweetly. 'Nothing troubles me much now, for heaven's peace is in my soul.'

"Then suddenly Montague gave a great groan and threw himself on the ground, and hid his dark head in her white dress; and oh, Guy! what do you think he told her? Why, that on the very night Mr. Monk died he had come to you and shown you an old letter she had written him years before, when she was a girl and he was her lover, in which she agreed to run away with him, so as not to marry Mr. Monk, and said that she loved only him. And he said he had made you think that letter was just written, and applied to *now*, instead of to ten years before. He said he did it as a last desperate chance, because he knew you loved her, and she you, and he thought he should lose her for ever. He ended up by crying in a terrible voice: 'Now curse me, Elaine, and bid me begone!'

"She stood very still for a little while; her

lips moved as though she was praying. Then she said gently, laying her hand on his bent head: 'No, Monty, I do not curse you; I can forgive you, though your treachery has cost me well-nigh a broken heart. I see now how base I must seem in my noble young lover's eyes; and yet, before I knew *all* that he thought me, I felt he was right to go—for I am not worthy of him. And oh! Montague, though it has cost me hours of deathly agony, I cannot wish it otherwise; for when he went abroad, and I was left so lonely and forsaken, I learnt to know the One who will never leave me nor forsake me.' Then she sat down on the moss, and talked to him for a long, long time about what Christ is to her. Oh, Guy, it was so touching! Lord Montague lay on the ground, his face hidden on his arm, and once I heard him sob. At last her voice grew very weak and tired, and she told him he must go.

"He got up, and stood before her. 'Elaine,' he said, 'I will seek the wide world over, and never rest until I find Guy Mervyn.'

"'No, dear,' she answered; 'don't do that. It is better as it is. I will tell his mother all, and some day he will know.'

"Then he took her hand in his to bid her good-bye, with such a face of anguish that I could bear it no longer. I rushed away, and I don't know how they parted.

"In the evening Lady Elaine had a long talk with mother. They went and sat in your little study, in the twilight; and when mother came out, I saw she had been crying.

"That is all. Oh, Guy dear, am I right to tell you?

"If not, forgive, oh! *please* forgive, your loving little

"BERRY."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"When did you write it, dear?" Elaine said gently, smoothing back Berry's tumbled hair.

"Four days ago; so I might have had an answer last night, and it did not come, or this morning either. And I am so miserable in this horrible suspense; and at last I felt I must confess it all to you."

They were out in the wood, Elaine resting at her favourite seat, Berry kneeling beside her.

"I don't think you need be so troubled about it, darling," Elaine said kindly. "I know you did it for the best, and so will Guy. Now you must run home, for you promised

Gertrude to be ready to go out with her at four, and it is nearly that. I can easily return alone. I shall stay quietly here for a little while, first."

Left by herself, Elaine took off her hat and laid it on her lap. Then, folding her hands, she rested her head against the tree, and looked away over the green, waving cornfields.

"So he knows—Guy knows by now that Monty has deceived him."

She dares not look on, to the future, but her mind goes back over the past; and every scene in which he and she have figured rises before her.

She sees him, in this very wood, a boisterous frank-hearted boy, bounce out into the path before her and stand, cap in hand, asking her to forgive him his awkwardness.

Again she sees him—a boy no longer—

kneeling here at her feet, and forcing her to listen to the confession of his desperate, hopeless love for her. A mist dims her eyes, as she remembers the broken-hearted, boyish figure lying at full length on the moss, and how she had to turn away and leave him there.

But now she sees him as he returned from his long absence—that reckless look, which had haunted her for months, gone from his face, and in its place the steadfast shining of some great inward joy. She sees him bravely telling her about his Lord, and owning his own sin in having loved her.

She sees him standing up in his own park, the setting sunlight shining on his head, earnestly pleading with that crowd of village people to love and serve his own dear Master.

And then, a pang of sadness at her heart, she sees him ever true, and brave, and firm,

in her own times of terrible heart-weakness.

And last of all, he stands beside her in the moonlight, pistol in hand, and bravely faces the dark tempter of her purity, and saves her there from worse than death.

"Oh, my Guy!" she whispers; "true, tender, faithful to the end; how you must have suffered on that night! What must it have cost your loyal, honest heart to acknowledge me so base, so vile, so false as Monty led you to believe?"

She closed her eyes; and all was very still and silent in the wood.

But hark! Hurried footsteps are drawing near! She looks up quickly, and sees Guy hastening towards her down the mossy path.

She rises, with outstretched hands, and goes two steps to meet him, her pale face flushing, the sunlight shining on her golden hair.

Now he is close beside her; her hands are clasped in his. "Lady Elaine," he begins, but stops short, as their eyes meet. One low cry bursts from them—the concentrated yearning of these lonely months—and the next moment they are locked in one another's arms; and for a brief space, to Guy and Elaine, there is no outer world.

* * * * *

"Oh, my darling," Guy is saying for the twentieth time in the last ten minutes, "I love you, I love you! Shall I ever be able to make you understand how much?"

Elaine sat at the foot of the old beech-tree; Guy lay on the moss at her feet, with both his strong arms clasped round her, gazing up with passionate tenderness into her sweet face.

She smiled into his eyes, and stroked his hair tenderly with her thin white fingers.

"Oh, my lover," she whispered, "my own

boy-lover! Is this too great a happiness? Can I quite bear it, I wonder?"

Her lips quivered, but her eyes shone with a wondrous joy.

"My sweet one," he said anxiously; "how ill you must have been, to look as you do now, so long after. I had hoped to find you quite yourself again."

She laid her thin hand gently over his eyes.

"My boy mustn't look at me, now I am so changed and ugly; he must remember me only as I was."

"Ugly!" he cried, drawing his head back. "Oh, my lovely sweetheart, to me you look lovelier each day, and always sweetest as you are! How I have hungered for a sight of your dear face; and oh! for more than that —for more than that, Elaine!"

They were silent for awhile, for, obedient to his pleading look, she had bent over him and laid her lips on his.

Presently he said, as if the thought had just occurred to him :

"And, darling, you will marry me? It seems so strange, so wonderful to think that you will really be—my wife." He bent his head, as he uttered the last words in tender, thrilling tones, and kissed her hand.

A silence fell between them. Then she said gently, trying hard to still the trembling of her voice :

"Guy darling, that can never be. I cannot marry you."

He raised his head in sudden, stunned surprise.

"You cannot marry me?" he repeated slowly. "And why?"

Her lips quivered. She struggled in vain to answer him.

"My Ellie," Guy said, in a low, pleading voice ; "who should you marry, if not your own boy-lover? I love you, sweet, and

you love me; so who can come between us? I am young, I know, but what matters that? My arm will be all the stronger for you to lean upon; and surely, my darling, you can trust me?"

She made no answer; but her silent tears fell upon his face.

"Dearest," he pleaded tenderly, "you won't say no, and part us once again after these long, hard months? Besides, why should you? Has not our own dear Lord given us to each other? Are we not *one* in Him for evermore?"

"Yes, Guy," she whispered; "one in Him for evermore."

"Then why say you cannot marry me?" he urged.

Then she took his head between her hands and gazed into his face.

"Oh, my poor boy-lover!" she cried wistfully; "can't you *see* why? Then I must

try and tell you; but oh, Guy, I *cannot* while you look at me like that!" She drew his head against her breast, and clasped her hands over his face. Then looking up to the blue sky above: "O, Lord," she said, "his Lord and mine; help me to break to my poor boy what is Thy loving will for us; and oh, help him to bear it!"

A silence in the wood.

Then she says steadily, holding him closer to her:

"Guy, I cannot marry you, because Another calls me unto Him. In a few short months—perhaps even weeks—I must leave my earthly lover and go to dwell forever with the Heavenly Bridegroom of my soul. They say I am dying quickly, Guy, and that no earthly skill can save me. Look at me, dearest. You will see that it is true."

Slowly Guy raised his head, and looked

into her face. She saw the dumb, despairing anguish creep into his eyes, then he flung himself down on the grass with an exceeding bitter cry, and lay quite still, his face hidden in the soft moss.

For a long time they neither of them spoke; but she gently stroked his wavy hair, as she had done, in that same spot, years before.

"Darling," she whispered at last, "try and be brave for my sake."

He murmured something about "Montague" and "precious weeks lost."

"Oh no, Guy, don't say that!" she cried. "Listen, dear! If I had had you all this time, I should have leaned on you, and clung to you, and thought of you alone. And when I drew near to the dark valley, you could have gone with me no further; and, trembling and alone, I should have been launched — a helpless, hopeless soul —

into Eternity. But now—oh, Guy, the Everlasting Arms are round me; I lean upon my Saviour's breast; my soul hath found a true, sure resting-place; and when they say, 'Arise, He calleth thee,' when my eyes must look their last on your dear face, they will open in the presence of the King; and I shall truly say: 'Absent from my lover—but, oh! present with my Lord!'

Guy raised his head and looked at her. Her face was radiant with a heavenly joy. The setting sun shone in her eyes and on her golden hair.

Then Guy arose, and tenderly, reverently took her in his arms.

"Oh, my sweet love," he said; "the Lord hath need of thee. He knoweth best. We will await His call together, trusting, and not afraid."

Then, leaning on her lover, Elaine turned slowly homeward—to his home and hers—

just for a little while. And the soft breeze wafted gently through the old beech-tree, and whispered sadly in its rustling leaves: "Good-bye, good-bye."

CHAPTER XL.

The next few weeks were very peaceful ones at Mervyn Hall. Life went on much as usual. Lady Elaine was downstairs with them every day; and though they saw her fading quickly before their very eyes, she was so bright, and gay, and happy, that Gertrude and Beryl found it impossible to realise how very near she was to the unseen, unknown land beyond. Sometimes, as they all sat at tea together under the trees, and Elaine lay back laughing at Berry's prattle, and joining in their general talk with almost girlish brightness, Guy himself could hardly believe that she was really slipping from

them. He had had the best physicians down from London ; but human skill could avail nothing. "Rapid decline," they said ; "the end might be far off, or it might be very near, but slowly and surely it must come." So he bravely set himself to cheer and brighten these last short moments of his darling's life.

He had begged her at first to marry him, even then. She lay on the sofa in his little study. "Oh, sweet one," he had said, kneeling beside her in the dim twilight ; "I know you are all my own. I know it would make no difference *now*. But when you are gone, it would comfort me to hear you spoken of as my wife. Let Cyril marry us quietly, darling ; just to give me the right to call you that, and hear you say : 'Guy, my husband.'" But Elaine had answered, firmly : "No, my boy-lover. I love you too well to cast a shadow like that over your bright young life.

Some day you will meet one, young also, bright and sweet in her fresh girlhood, and *she* will be that to you. Then you will look back, and see that I was right. And, Guy dear, tell her that I thought of her, and prayed she might be all my dear boy needed; and, looking down upon you both, I shall bless her if she is. And I shall not feel jealous, darling; for no other woman can ever have what is *mine*, my own forever—the *first* strong love of my young lover's heart." So he had urged it no more; and little dreamed what it had cost Elaine to say him nay.

They were very undemonstrative before the others. The most even the mother ever saw was Elaine's hand tenderly stroking Guy's hair, as he sat on a low stool at her feet in the evenings, reading aloud to them both. But they were much alone; and what passed between them then was all too deep

and sacred for any eyes to look upon. Only they two, and their Lord who was ever near them, knew what their love grew to be in these few precious weeks.

After awhile, Guy used to carry her up and down the stairs in his strong arms; and later, when chill autumn drew in, and she could no longer be out of doors, they arranged a sitting-room upstairs, to save her the fatigue of coming down.

One evening, when he said good-night to her, she took his face between her hands, and looked into it long and wistfully.

"Darling," she said, "when I am dying, will you smile at me just like that? I wish that look, so long the sunshine of my life, to be the last earthly thing my eyes shall look upon. And say 'good-night' to me dearest, not 'good-bye.'

A few days later, as the twilight was gathering, she suddenly grew very weary.

"Guy darling," she said faintly; "I am too tired to stay up. Carry me to my room."

He took her there, and left her to his mother.

After awhile they sent for him. He found her lying propped up with pillows, beating her thin hands restlessly up and down, and wearily turning her head from side to side.

"Oh, Guy," she murmured, looking up at him with great wistful eyes; "oh, try and help me, darling! I am so tired, so tired, and yet I can't lie still."

He sat down on the bed, and put his arms around her, and let her lean upon his breast.

"Sweetheart," he whispered tenderly; "cannot you rest if I hold you so?"

"Yes, Guy," she answered; "this *is* rest."

"Leave us alone, mother dear," he said. "Perhaps she will sleep."

"Guy," she whispered presently; "how good our dear Lord has been to us; oh, how good!"

"Yes, darling. We must trust Him to the end."

"What will the end be like, Guy?" she asked in a quivering, frightened voice.

"Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty," he whispered, bending over her.

"Oh, yes!" she cried, with a radiant smile. "I had forgotten, because I am so tired. My King—my lovely Jesus!"

Then she lay very still in his arms, her golden hair flowing over her white night-dress, her sweet face half hidden against his breast.

The room grew slowly dark.

The flickering firelight rose and fell, casting strange shadows over the bed.

Mrs. Mervyn entered softly.

"Hush, mother!" Guy whispered. "She has fallen asleep."

Mrs. Mervyn took a low chair, and sat down near the hearth. No sound broke the stillness, save the slow ticking of the clock, and the occasional fall of a cinder from the fire.

Guy sat on, motionless, his arms around her, fearing to move, lest she should wake.

At last the door was pushed noiselessly open, and Bidger slipped in, in search of his master. He came close up and looked into Guy's face, and laid his nose lovingly against Elaine's hand; then, with a low howl, fled from the room.

Mrs. Mervyn rose, and came to the bedside.

"Mother," Guy whispered, "do keep that dog out! Ellie is sleeping so quietly. It will do her no end of good."

Mrs. Mervyn touched that still, cold hand,

started, and quickly left the room. She came back, in a few moments, followed by Cyril.

Very gently he advanced to the side of the bed, and laid his hand on Guy's shoulder.

"Guy," he said, "dear old fellow; all is over. She is with the Lord."

"Hush!" Guy answered, without moving. "She is only asleep."

Cyril turned away. "Fetch a light," he said brokenly.

Muriel and Berry, standing with tearful eyes in the doorway, brought one in. Mrs. Mervyn took it from them, and coming gently to the bedside, let the light fall on that calm, peaceful face.

Guy bent over his darling, and looked in silence.

"Oh, Guy!" his mother cried; "my own poor boy, you must come away!"

Then Guy spoke.

"Yes, mother," he said quietly; "the call has come. She sees the King in His beauty, now. We must close her sweet eyes to all earthly sights."

He laid her back upon the pillows, and gently did it himself; then stood looking down at her, silently.

Only Berry's sobs broke the stillness, as she stood, with Muriel's arms around her, in the doorway.

Guy turned towards them.

"Mother dear," he said; "Muriel, Cyril, little Berry; all of you go away for a little while. I must be quite alone."

So they left him there; but pausing for a moment at the door, they saw him drop on his knees beside the bed, and throw his arms around her, and lay his head on his dead sweetheart's breast.

* * * * *

And so they found him, half an hour later,

when they came softly back. At first they thought he had fallen asleep, but when he heard them enter he rose up.

"Yes, mother," he said calmly. "I will go now." Then he bent down and laid his lips on those still, lifeless ones.

"Good-night," he whispered; "my love, my darling! Until the day dawn—good-night."

Then, with his brave young head held high, and the light of heaven shining in his eyes, Guy Mervyn left the room.

THE END.

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